NEW CANTERBURY TALES

MAURICE HEWLETT

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BY

MAURICE HEWLETT

AUTHOR OF "RICHARD YEA-AND-NAY," "THE FOREST LOVERS"
"EARTHWORK OUT OF TUSCANY," ETC.

"Dic mihi, Damœta, cujum pecus? An Melibœi?"

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To

FREDERIC HARRISON

WITH SINCERE RESPECT

ADVERTISEMENT

COURTESY asks me to record hospitality offered by the way to most of these tales: to *The Scrivener's* by the "Fortnightly Review"; to *Captain Brazenhead's* by the same review and "Truth" of New York; to the *Prioress of Ambresbury's* by the same and "Collier's Weekly" of New York; to *Richard Smith's Tale* by "Harper's Magazine"; and to *Percival Perceforest's* by the "Anglo-Saxon Review." *Dan Costard* (wisely, as some think) kept his story to himself; but very likely the wisdom was not his.

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THE PROLOGUE

NEW CANTERBURY TALES

THE PROLOGUE

PRAY do not suppose that Chaucer's were the only pilgrims to woo the Canterbury way with stories, nor that theirs was the only road by which to seek the Head of Thomas. His people may have set the fashion and himself a tantalizing standard of attainment; but that is a poor-hearted chronicler who withholds from a tale because some other has told one well. I have here the diversions of a devout sodality, which followed Chaucer's — and in point of time (remember) at no such long interval. Their journey, however, took longer to perform, their tales (for reasons which I am not bound to divulge, and shall not) were reported in the common speech of us all. At least in the matter of roads — whether Canterbury or entertainment be the end — our *primum mobile* may not engross the market. The main stream of piety was no more his than was London the well-head of England. All pilgrims from the West, and all they who, coming from oversea, touched our land at Southampton, journeyed out from Winchester, at Guilford joined hands, after that climbed the ridge of the North Downs (or climbed it half), and never left it again until the

Medway chose that they must. So doing, tending from old English burgh to old Roman, they followed a road incredibly older than that from London; for long before their day or Saint Thomas's, English feet, Latin feet, British and (if the tale be true) Trojan feet had trudged it, bringing mine up from the West to be smithied in the forests of Sussex, then loaded into galleys whose helmsmen knew all the shoals at the Nore. You may well doubt whether there had been any other path for slave or legionary or wild adventurer of the North through those impenetrable wealden woods. My pilgrims, then, took this ancient road, assembling for the purpose at Winchester, as nearly as possible upon the Feast of Saints Philip and Jacob, which was in the year of Christ's reign fourteen-hundred and fifty, and in the twenty-eighth year of that of King Henry VI., a pious, unhappy, and nearly imbecile monarch, quite damned in a magnanimous wife.

The Prioress of Ambresbury (in Wilts) was head and shoulders of this company, a well-preserved, stately lady, born Touchett of Bemerton, more tender than she looked or her station required, having a quick spot in her heart which minstrels, young women, and boys soon learned to find. Travelling privately, as became her degree, she brought with her a numerous retinue, of which one only, Dan Costard her confessor, is of our direct concern — a loose-skinned old man with mild blue eyes, coloured (as it seemed) by that Heaven which he daily sought; and another of some little interest, the immediate cause of pilgrimage to the whole party. This was Mistress

Mawdleyn Touchett, niece of the Prioress, daughter of her brother Sir Simon Touchett of Bemerton, Knight, a very fine girl; whom Percival Perceforest (Sir Simon's footpage) had deplorably loved. The fact discovered beyond possible denial — if either had sought to deny what exalted each so much, — stripes and dismissal followed for the youth, disgrace and the Convent of Ambresbury for the young lady. While Percival nursed his bruised back and wounded heart in Wiltshire ditches, his beloved was schooled by the nuns, one of whom was kinder than she should have been. Saint Thomas beckoned the Prioress to Canterbury, Mawdleyn was hooded for the journey; admonished by that too kindly Sister Petronilla, Percival Perceforest limped behind. How he met with his mistress at Winchester, what fortune he had, how he was enabled to be of the party and tell the tale which undoubtedly he did tell, belongs not to this history, full as it is of diverting matter, but is rather a history of itself. I ask you to be more concerned with the tales than the tellers. Percival Perceforest (who was born in Gloucester) was a lady-faced youth with a long nose, a sharp chin, and hot green eyes. He had a very small mouth, and knew most of the Romaunt de la Rose by heart, as well as the Songs of Horatius Flaccus.

Of Captain Brazenhead some mention must be made, of Captain Salomon Brazenhead, fertile in wiles, formerly of Milan, late of Burgundy, now a Duke of York's man, friend of the Captain of Kent. Of his hair, of his nose, of his thirst, his two scars, his notched forefinger, his magnilo-

quent conversation, I prefer to be silent at this time. He obtruded himself upon the notice of the Prioress of Ambresbury, he called himself (and she believed him) her friend; he was heart and soul in the trying business of Percival Perceforest and Mawdleyn Touchett; he made Sister Petronilla dream dreams and tell a series of fibs: all for reasons. What is this, or what are they, to our purpose? But that he told a tragic tale of Italy is certain, for here at page 102 you will find it. Let that suffice of Captain Salomon.

The Prioress's pilgrimage was performed apart, I have said. This means that she chose not to go at the great pilgrim-seasons of Christmas and Midsummer, when the roads were full, the towns hives, the chapels reeking, the whole country-side aswarm; but rather in seclusion, with her own servants about her, her familiar friends for her hosts of the night, and at her journey's end space, that so she and Saint Thomas might be free to hob-nob together. This was her desire, very nearly achieved — yet not quite. As you know, Percival Perceforest went with her, and Captain Brazenhead. At the last moment three others petitioned for her society and comfort in terms too humble to be refused. One was a Scrivener of London, and very timid man; the other a certain Master Smith, Richard Smith mariner, who came from Kingston-upon-Hull and had left his ship in the Medina River. He pleaded the delicacy of his foreign wife, and the Prioress could not deny him. She appointed the morrow of the Feast for these persons to join her. Until then she was guest of the Abbot of Hyde: they were

to meet her at the gates at such and such an hour, in travelling trim — and they did. Each of them contributed a tale to the week's solace, and one of them a good deal more. But of that in its place.

Here, then, you have the tellers of these New Canterbury Tales: the Lady Prioress of Ambresbury, Master Corbet the Scrivener of London, Dan Costard the Prioress's confessor, Smith the shipman of Hull, Captain Brazenhead formerly of Milan, and Percival Perceforest, who was born in Gloucester. The first day brought them to New Alresford, the second to Waverley Abbey, the third to Reigate on the side of the hill, the fourth to the Abbey of Boxley in Kent, and the fifth to Christchurch, Canterbury. Now then, *Pergite, Pierides.*

THE SCRIVENER'S TALE

THE SCRIVENER'S TALE OF THE COUNTESS ALYS*

THE manner of the beginning of these tales was this. Percival Perceforest had sung a good part of the Romaunt de la Rose, and sung it well, in a high, clear, unfaltering voice which was neither proper man's nor certain boy's, but of the sort we call *alto*. This intrigued, before it wearied, Smith the shipman, but delighted Captain Brazenhead, who had (in a sort) adopted the youth. At the end of his recital, "Is this young man your nephew, soldier?" asked the shipman. Captain Brazenhead flicked upwards his moustachios.

"I would like to see the older man who denies it," he said with a glitter in his eye. For Percival was by no means his nephew.

"I have nephews," says the shipman, "who sing tenor, and nieces who sing treble. And the Pope, I hear, hath nieces. How now, master?"

Captain Brazenhead was meditating, stroking his nose. "Now," said he quietly, "now could I cut thee in half, thou shotten herring."

"Let me go, wife, let me go!" cried the shipman, who was strangling. Captain Brazenhead had stroked his nose till it burned: there might have been bloodshed within three miles of Winchester.

Here the Scrivener intervened.

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"Madame," said this worthy man to the Prioress, "instead of singing by rote, instead of hot debate, I perceive another pastime. I propose a tale from one of this company, all in the manner of that noble clerk and fellow of my mystery, Master Geoffrey Chaucer, of whom doubtless you have heard. What is more to the purpose, I (if your ladyship please) will begin with one of the most fruitful narratives you ever heard; and although rhyme shall be lacking (for I am no rhymester for choice), I promise you the other elements of art, as balance, careful heed to longs and shorts, proportion, exquisite choice, these things (I promise you) shall not be lacking. If that will content your ladyship and this amiable company, I shall myself be contented. More than that I can scarcely say."

"I see on the hill the good town of Alresford," said Captain Brazenhead. "There should be beer there, for my poor nephew's dry throat."

"I shall be done before we reach that town," replied the Scrivener. They were now out of that open country where Kingsworthy stands, and in the deepening valley of the Itchen. Itchen Abbas, with a grange of the Abbot of Hyde's, was past. They saw the grey downs on either side of them, a long white hill in front, with dust where strayed a flock of sheep: beyond that New Alresford must be hidden in trees.

The Scrivener was bid tell his tale. Percival's hand rested on Mawdleyn's stirrup, touching Mawdleyn's foot.

Here follows the Scrivener's Tale of the King and the Countess Alys

"First I shall tell you," said the Scrivener, "how the fair Countess Alys lived at Wark like a nesting bird.

"I daresay you have heard of our very famous King and liege lord Edward, the third after the Conquest; who, to enforce his reasonable claims upon that country, smote France a buffet on either ear, took prisoners the king and the king's son, wore their lilies lightly on his shield, left them (too heavy a burden) to his successors, and (in fine) did all that was reasonable to requite the indignities put upon his ancestors, King Henry of the Short Coat, King Richard Cordelion, and King John the Pope's footstool, who (as they say) did more valiantly in bed, thinking what he would perform, than out of it in true performance. I make no doubt but you have heard of him, and mostly to his advantage, since God our Saviour hath so ordered our mundane affairs that the good a man does lives longer than the evil, and so the Devil is denied even infamy in the long run. This being the case, as I assure you it is, do not suppose that I hold enemy's cards if I recall to you a deed of this King's not so well done as others of his: no, but my zeal for a noble lady can only be served at his expense; and yet I believe he can well afford it. Besides all that, the tale is true.

"This King Edward, being a famous warrior, had a huge frame after the antick fashion of his forefathers, shoulders like a platform, massy legs,

arms like towers, the chest of a town bull. A fair long beard he had down to his middle, a square bulging brow, a face hatchet-shaped, and light blue eyes that glittered in his head like candle flames. He was ruddy and tawny-haired like all his race, which never bred black men to endure, a stupendous lover of women, most intrepid in fight, ruthless in purpose, speedy of counsel; beloved therefore by all them who fought hard, determined strongly, and jumped their conclusions: by none more than by Sir William Montacute, Earl of Salisbury and Warden of the Northern March, who would have been at his duty at the time of my tale if he had not been in the King of France his prison of Châtelet, so held ever since the stampede of Lille in Flanders. As it was, the Countess his wife, with Sir William Montacute his sister's son, held on his account the lonely Castle of Wark, which sits upon the south bank of the Tweed, watching the brown slopes of Scotland; and sees the border thieves, shaggy, small-eyed men, come creeping round the sunny rocks; and waits, knowing it can give as good as they."

"Man," said Dan Costard, the Prioress's confessor, "your periods are too long. You are out of breath already."

"There are no better periods in the world than my periods," said the Scrivener, comfortably. "Please to attend."

"Now, this Countess Alys was a beautiful young woman, not turned twenty, the second wife of her husband, of great descent (being born De Grandison), thinnish and rather tall, with a bosom of snow,

pale oval face, and long brown hair close about it; with full blue eyes, a little mouth, a long straight nose, a sharp chin, and a narrow neck."

Smith the shipman ticked off these parts on Percival's unconscious person, even while Percival in adoration was ticking them off on his Mawdleyn's, and Mawdleyn's brown eyes melted under the fire of his. "All these he hath, with a voice like a reed pipe, and calleth himself man! Go to: I will plumb this mystery anon," said the former to himself with many a shake of the head.

"Withal," the Scrivener continued, "she had a wild look, with some audacity and much innocent hardihood; as though, like Taillefer at Senlac, she played with her virtue, tossing it up, but always catching it again. This was the Countess Alys, very young, who held the Castle of Wark against the Scots with the aid of a few vassals and her husband's sister's son, and did most honourably all that pertained to the estate of a great man's wife; being a tender stepmother to his grown children, a careful spender of his house and gear, foster-mother to his servants, keeper of his honour and bed, and (when he was at home) content with nothing so much as to sit by his knee or upon it, cheerfully, meekly, wholly submissive to his pleasures or reproofs. All this I find to be quite as it should be. The Earl of Salisbury might have been her father, but he was her good husband as it happened. And as she revered him, so he gave her full confidence and, while he was in prison, his honour to keep.

"Of his children, two fine boys some five years younger than herself, she took the greatest care.

What poor lore she had of her own she imparted to them: love, namely, of various sorts. The first, Love of God; comprehended in that, Love of father and mother; dependent upon that, Love of race. In this manner she grew in them a pretty garden of sweet briars whereon some day the rose itself of Love might come to perfection. For the rest, she had confided them to the care of a young man named Lancelot, a scholar of Ghent, well versed in poetry, philosophy, and all the gentle arts, hopeful to become a great clerk.

"Now this was the position of affairs at Wark, and this their quiet order, when the noble King Edward was twenty-five years old, a twelve-year King by no means sated of glory in field or bower. Far from that, he sought the strife of both sorts wherever it might be found, but chiefly in the northern parts of his realm — for such, after the precepts of his ancestors, he always held Scotland to be. At this moment opportunity was not denied him, seeing that King David of that country was paying a visit to his ally the King of France: therefore our King made a great invasion of the lands about Berwick; burning, pillaging, laying them waste, taking his diversion; then (as the winter came on quickly) withdrawing himself to his good town of York, to keep his Christmas, rest his men, and make preparations for a new inrush as soon as the passes of the hills should be open. But in the meantime King David, sailing from France with a power, came home, and touched land at Montrose. They tell him of the unhappy state of his southern parts, not without tears. 'Have at you, dog of an

Englishman,' says King David, a fierce man of considerable inches. Then and there, amid the mists of November (which the Scots, who live mostly in fogs, care little about), he with his force came down into the Merse, and drew out in keen lines from Kelso even unto Berwick. King David himself with a good company of earls and barons laid siege to the Castle of Wark, wherein (like a nesting bird) the young Countess Alys sat close, as might be upon her eggs — which were the gear, the sons, and the fair fame of her lord in prison.

"When first this danger affronted her — the shock of one dense night — it was like a slap in the face, which caused her spirit, flushing, to rise high and meet it. When soon it encompassed her on every side, so that the very woods and shaws round about the castle lawns were full of armed Scots, then her spirit soared. That good Earl, her husband, would have been proud of his wife. Soft-faring, delicate, silk-enwrapt as she was, she watched out the cruel winter days from the tower-top, whether the wet mist clung about her and drenched her hair, or a rude tingling gale from the west blew it out like a flag before her face, or the north wind dried her thin, or driving sleet made her figure dim: whatever the smack of weather might be, she stood by the banner of Montacute watching (though she could not beat off) the eager hordes from Scotland. King David, they say, with his earls rode often close under the tower to hold parley with her. 'Come you down, dear madame, come away down,' he would say, 'before I send to bring you down. I promise you

a snug bower in Edinburgh, and a king for your paramour.' Or, again, he would bid them raise towers against her tower, or lay mines against her mines, or cast great stones out of engines to batter her walls, or make rams of tree-trunks, or raise up scaling-ladders, so that thieves and cut-throats with knives in their mouths might swarm over moat and drawbridge and drown all her little empire in blood. The Countess Alys, with small, high, unfaltering head, watched all this meditated rapine, met attack by attack, and defied (though she framed no words) the defiance of King David. So at last, about Christmas time, the snow being very deep, the King of Scots sat down behind the wattles of his trenches, saying, 'If we cannot burn them out or cut them out, we will starve them in, by the chief gods of Scotland.'

"So the year wore from Christmas to Epiphany, and so to Candlemas, with frost and great drifts of snow, until February came, and a spell of warm wet weather. Then the Countess said to her kinsman Montacute, 'This open weather makes me hungry, cousin. I think that nothing should hinder the King now. Surely he will come.'

"'Madame,' says Montacute, 'why should he come? He knows nothing of your peril, and Berwick (not Wark) is the apple of his eye. When he moves out of York he will march on Berwick, I lay my head.'

"The Countess looked doubtfully forth upon the rain, how it carved for itself channels in the pitted snow. 'I cannot let our good people starve, William,' she said. 'My lord might be

displeased with me. And he would be sorry; for these men have served me well.'

"'One should ride to the King, then,' says Montacute.

"'The Scots would have something to say to that,' the Countess considered.

"Then Montacute asked, 'Can you hold out against I come again?'

"'God will reward you,' says she, not answering his question; and he, who had not expected an answer, says, 'Good, I go.'

"So Montacute rode out under cover of the dark and a furious rainstorm, clean through the Scottish camp. He reaches York and sees the King of England taking his pastime with ladies in his hall. He tells him all the case of Wark. 'By our Lord,' cries the King, 'you are better now than not at all, Montacute; but you are fully late.'

"'Sire,' says Montacute, 'I dared not leave my cousin Madame de Salisbury before.'

"'Get back the way you came in,' says the King, 'and bid your lady expect me soon.' So Montacute took his leave.

"Now you shall hear," said the Scrivener, "how love smote the King of England on both cheeks.

"Montacute got into Wark as he had got out of it, in safety and honour, the cause of death to two Scots. He put heart into the young Countess, who saw (as it were) her children saved from the jaws of the dragon. You may be sure that she did not fail to let the King of Scots know what he

might expect if he stayed; for this was according to the usages of war in an honourable age. Now King David, for his part, believed what she told him, as (having been a whole winter in her near company) he could not fail to do either. He bade her a courteous farewell, promising to come again when times were better to renew his suit; and withdrew his forces over Tweed, and fell back on Jedburgh, secure among hills and morasses. The Countess with a beating heart threw wide the doors of Wark, and let the sweet air in.

"She made great preparations to receive the King, liege lord of her lord. From the store-houses she drew abundance of scented rushes for the floors of hall and chambers; she hung out the arras and painted cloths, set candles of wax (three pounds to a candle) all about, and bade her huntsmen kill stags, swans, herons, boars, and salmon. When they told her that Tweed was ice-bound yet, so that the salmon could not get up, she threw back her head in the high way she had, and bade them break the ice with mattocks as far as Berwick Weirs. This must needs be done. Men of hers and horses went to meet the King at Hexham and bring him home by way of the North Tyne and Redesdale into the Vale of Tweed. There finally, outside the walls of war-worn Wark, the Countess Alys met him a first time, she standing under a canopy upon a red cloth of estate, her women with her, nobly dressed in a close gown of blue and silver, with a great head-dress of silver, and ermine fur all round her neck, and all round the hem of her gown. Her eyes were very bright, in her cheeks

was great colour, extremely noble fire. When she saw the King she knelt down upon the cloth, her women still standing, until Montacute had helped him to alight; and then she got up and, running forward, knelt again before him; and took his mailed hand and kissed it; but said nothing, because, being quite young, she was afraid of the glory of kings.

"Now, had this been a lady of common favour, the King would have picked her up and kissed her; for that was the hardy way of his race, signally exemplified in himself. But instead — at this near sight of her starry beauty — he grew red as fire, began to tremble, got a mist across his eyes, and was choked by the shortness of his breath. No more than she had he his words at command, no more than she did he know how to be bold. *O dea certè!* was his thought, and, *I am a sinful man:* but whereas she looked fast on the ground, he looked fast at her, awfully absorbed and wrought upon, forgetful of time, place, errand, degree, and business in the fresh and rare beauty of her who knelt at his disposal. As woman, she gained composure first, and 'Sire,' said trembling, 'I beg you be welcome in my lord's name to his house of Wark.' 'Ha, madame! God's face,' says the King, 'believe me glad to be here.' She dared to look up to his face at these honest words; whereby she saw in what way he was glad, and looked down again, all confused. So she busied herself with welcoming those who stood by — the Earl of Pembroke, her brother De Grandison, Sire Walter de Manny, the Lord Reginald Cobham, Sire Richard Stam-

ford, and others. Herein and in other needful business her cousin Montacute helped her with prudence: then came also the two boys of the Earl's, William and John de Montacute, with them their tutor Master Lancelot, to make their obeisance to the King. He by this time had recovered his nature, and behaved greatly.

"Heartened somewhat to play her necessary part, she took him by the hand, saying as cheerfully as she could, 'Come, Sire, repose yourself awhile. Afterwards you can pursue your enemies, who (at the mere bruit of your coming) have taken to flight.' The King had nothing to say but 'Ha, madame, is it so?' or 'Ha, madame, indeed!' no words for a great king, in my opinion; and suffered himself to be led whithersoever the lady chose.

"After he had bathed himself and put on a purple velvet gown, his circlet of gold and collar of gold, she took him into the hall, where dinner was served to him alone; she being cup-bearer, Montacute sewer of the meats, and the two boys carrying, one the ewer, basin, and towel, the other the manchets of bread. The lords were attended by her high officers of the household; all was done in noble order, with abundance to eat and drink, with minstrels in the gallery, dogs under the tables, a fool in a corner, and silver trumpets at the buttery door to cry the courses. All this to little purpose. The king picked at his food, said nothing, looked ever at his plate. But he drank cup after cup from those two fair hands, and inflamed his love without clearing his understanding. Whereafter, seeing he could find no

way at present of achieving what he so ardently desired, he sat moody and silent; but men perceived that the muscles of his upper jaw worked in and out like a mill as he ground his thoughts over and over. The Countess Alys perceived it too. 'Alack,' she thought, 'the King is not content with me.' And to Lancelot, the boys' governor, whom she greatly regarded, she said, 'What have I done amiss by our lord the King, think you, Lancelot?' 'My word, madame,' this one replies, with a sick, troubled face, 'I do not like to consider of the matter.' 'Will you ask my brother De Grandison for me, Lancelot?' she asks him. 'I beg you to excuse me, madame,' says the young man. So she turned away from him comfortless.

"But she thought, 'If I do not content the King, I shall dishonour my husband in his absence. I must never do that.' So she went herself to her brother De Grandison, who told her, that no doubt the King had private reasons for his discontent, and no doubt would impart them if he were asked. And 'I advise you, sister, to speak with the King yourself,' said this De Grandison. She waited till they had taken away the tables and the company had scattered, then watched to see what would follow, or what the King would do. He sent out the Earl of Pembroke to make ready the host; 'For,' says he in a ringing voice, 'I will not stay here, but pursue the Scots incontinent and sleep to-night in their villainous country.' After this he goes to a deep-set window in the hall where there is a seat, and sits there alone, drumming with his fin-

gers on the woodwork, one foot only restless, tip-tapping under his gown. The Countess takes her courageous heart in both hands, goes and stands behind the King. 'I beseech my lord the King,' she says, out of breath, 'to tell me wherein I have done amiss.' The King turns her a red and misty face. 'O God, madame,' he says brokenly, 'the mischief was done at your birth.'

"'I am content, dear Sire,' she replies freely; 'for then the fault is not mine.'

"'Ha, there is no fault in you, madame!' cries the King in a hot whisper; 'and there is none in me, by my head and crown. But there is great misery, and danger, and sorrow.'

"'I pray you tell me how I can content you, Sire,' says the Countess; and he, gazing intently at her, asks, 'Do you wish indeed to content me?'

"'Yes, Sire,' says she, faltering a little, for he was very hard-set, and a man overweening tall.

"'Why, so you shall, madame,' he replied in a moment; and got up and went out of the hall, taking with him De Grandison only. This flattered greatly the anxious man, who was poor, profuse, and ambitious; but it was only nature working in the King, to make him love the nearest thing for the sake of the far thing he loved best of all. The Countess withdrew to her chamber, where she found Lancelot with the two boys.

"'I am to content the King, Lancelot,' she told him, laughing with a little pleasant defiance, for she was half afraid of this glum tutor, yet proud of her successful dealing with the King. The

tutor scarcely looked up. 'As it must be, madame,' was all he had to say. And presently after, as she sat there, trying to coax him through the boys into friendlier case, there were heard three great blasts of a horn, and much clattering, with hinnying of horses and pawing of the ground, and running to the window (she and the boys), behold, the forces of England file out of the courtyard in resplendent order of mail and trapped horses, with banners, pensels, and gonfalons, all displayed, and many a blazoned shield; and then the Marshal of England, with the Earl of Pembroke in command of the host, and his esquires with their grooms all about him. 'Oh, the knights ride! The knights ride!' cried one of the boys, and clapped his hands: but the other craned his neck out of the window. 'I would see the King ride,' says he; then his brother, 'You knave, the King will stay here, to be with our mother.' Blushing to hear him, she turns quickly round to look at Lancelot, and sees him sitting at the table with his head in his two hands. Abashed, a little frightened, she knew not why, presently she left the room; and heard two things that frightened her indeed — the first, that William de Montacute her kinsman was gone into Scotland with the host, the second, that the King stayed at Wark for that night at least, with De Grandison for his only companion. After that she hid herself with her women until her brother sent for her, saying that he had urgent call to see her before supper.

"She went down, and found him walking about in the forecourt.

"'Sister,' said De Grandison, 'look to it that you content the King this night, seeing that he stays here, neglectful of his realm's business, for sake of you.'

"'For the sake of me, Otho?' says the Countess, very red; and he repeated, nodding his head in her direction, 'For the sake of you, Alys. The King, my master and friend,' he added, 'is a swift, intrepid gentleman, greatly given to his way — as his due is — and not to be brooked. To be sure, he will do as he chooses sooner or later; and they who yield the sooner are the sooner rewarded,' says he.

"'Why, what can I yield to the King of England that I have not yielded, of all the store left me by the King of Scotland?' cries the Countess, with the answer prophesied plain in the dismay of her face. All other answer she got was the brooding look of the lord Otho her brother, who, to end the talk, presently said, 'Kings ask much of us, their subjects, very much they ask — even to all that we have. But they give much in return, *pardieu;* and ours is a poor house,' says he. He meant the house of Grandison, which, however, was richer than he thought in the Countess Alys. She, sickened of advice, left him here, and saw nobody till supper time. De Grandison went to be with the King.

"To supper came the King in a royal mood. He made the Countess sit by his side; he plied her with meat and drink; he spoke little, but looked much. After supper he said, 'Now, madame, you and I shall play a game of chess. Are you willing?'

"She said, 'Very willing, Sire. But what shall be the stakes?'

"The King took a jewel from his finger, a great balass ruby in the midst of fine goldsmith's work. 'I lay this in pledge,' he told her. 'What do you lay?'

"She broke in, 'Alack, Sir, I have nothing of worth to lay beside your ring.' Said he, 'You have priceless worth in every ounce of your blood. I would play for your company, sweet lady.'

"The Countess looked wise. 'You shall not need to play for what you have in tribute, Sir. Here I am, honoured in your presence. And so long as you will have me so in honour, so long I will stay. Longer than that, or otherwise, you would not ask for me.'

"Said the King, 'Nevertheless I would play you for your company.' And he commanded them to bring the table, the board, and the pieces."

"Next," said the Scrivener, "you shall learn how the King and the Countess played at chess.

"The King had the red pieces, the Countess the white. They set the board, and the King put forth a horse. The Countess was in a sad quandary; you will understand, who may have played with princes ——"

"Ha! By my head, indeed!" murmured Captain Brazenhead —

"—— for if she beat the King she would have his ruby, too rare a possession for subjects to hold; and if he beat her she would be at his discretion — and what is the discretion of kings? All she

could hope for was to draw the game, an end which is difficult for a good player whose head is cool: now the Countess was an indifferent player, whose head ached. None stood by to watch the sport save my Lord Otho de Grandison, greatly interested; not at all Master Lancelot, the boys' governor. Him you are to suppose at his prayers apart.

"At first the King gained greatly: he took her bishop with his bishop, a rook of hers fell; he gave her check in eight moves. Each stroke drew a snigger from De Grandison. This quickened her. She brought up the queen's rook to the queen's square, then with the queen gave check: nothing for it but the King must cover with his queen. So the Countess took the King's queen, and had good hope of drawing the game, or (failing that) of winning it — for by now she thought, 'It is better that I have the King's ring than he subdue me.' Moreover, if I am to tell the truth, she was on her mettle, minded to win if she could. And it seemed as if the Fates, amorous of the bold, had been gained over to her side, for the King, exceedingly put out at the loss of his queen, played a game of revenges, aiming at slaughter rather than a prize. He lost a knight to a pawn, sacrificed to little purpose, made foolish exchanges, received check after check. De Grandison marvelled, the King saw his concern: at last he said, '*Peste*, madame, you play a good game of chess and make a bold attack. It seems that I must lose my ring; but think not the affair ended here.'

"'Dear Sir,' says she, 'if I attack with boldness it is for fear of your boldness. I pray you declare

a drawn game, and take it not amiss in me that I have fought for my side.'

"'By no means,' said the King, 'but greatly otherwise. I hope to give a better account of myself at another time and place.'

"'I am sure your Grace will be as merciful in victory as in reverse,' quoth the lady. 'Be not too sure,' said the King. 'Meantime I shall own myself worsted, and do you keep the ring.'

"'No, no, dear Sir,' cries she; 'the game is drawn. I may not take what I have not won. I lose nothing and your Grace loses nothing; but honour,' she says with meaning, 'is saved to each.' The King with a nod sent De Grandison out of the room; off he went on the tips of his toes: immediately the King took the hand of the lady. 'Dearest madame,' he said, 'I love you more than my life.' She did not try to take her hand away, for she knew very well that to struggle would be to evoke stronger forces than she could command, or he afterwards call off. 'Sire,' she said, 'I am sure that your gracious words would rejoice the heart of my lord in prison — prisoned indeed in your service.'

"'I am glad that you think so,' replied the King. 'I have always found the Earl of Salisbury a good subject.' After this he paused, still holding her hand, but without any words. What could she do, poor soul, but stay as she was, caught, trepitant, nonplussed, alone with the great King, with eyes like a hare's, that look sideways for danger? After a time of sufficient embarrassment he kissed the caught hand two or three times, saying with soft urgency, 'Be merciful, most lovely Alys.' She

answered him gravely, 'I may not presume, Sire. Mercy is the prerogative of kings.'

"'Ah, I cannot be merciful, I cannot be merciful!' he cried. 'I am driven, you blind me, I faint.'

"'Alas, my lord,' says the Countess, 'if the running dog faint, what must the hind do?'

"'Have pity,' says the King, off his guard, 'and succour the hound.'

"'Not so, my lord King,' the Countess made answer, and the true answer. 'Not so, but escape before the hound wins back his breath.' Whereupon she lightly withdrew her hand, and lightly sped out of the room. She went to her oratory to make thanksgiving, thence gratefully to bed.

"The King sat on where he was for a goodish part of the night; next morning after mass took his leave, with great ceremony, fair speeches, and no seen remembrance. The Countess, who hoped all good things of him, paid him her humble duty, and took up again the gentle, ordered manner of her life."

"I speak now," the Scrivener went on, after a pause, of a greater game than chess.

"The first move in this greater game had been played on the very morning at Wark when the King took leave of the Countess of Salisbury, but before such leave-taking. Having slept badly, he rose up betimes and sent for one of the Countess's bedchamber women, a French woman called Nicole, recommended to him by De Grandison. To her he gave the balass ruby from his finger,

saying that the Countess had won it of him overnight at chess, but had been ashamed to take it of him. Nicole therefore was to lay it among her mistress's jewels without a word said; and if any one at any time remarked it, or asked whence it came, he or she (said the King) was to be told, that the King had begged Madame Alys to accept of it in remembrance of a happy game. '*Dame*, Sire!' cries Nicole, 'but if my mistress discover it?' To which the King replied, 'She will not discover it, *ma mie*, if you are a good girl;' and gave money. Nicole promised to do her duty. So then the King set out for Scotland in the manner I have told you of already.

"After these things, in the summer time, the noble Earl of Salisbury wrote letters to his wife, saying that his royal gaoler of France, very courteously, had promised to exchange his person against that of the Lord of Châteaudun, prisoner in England; and that he doubted not but the King, his liege lord, would extend a like grace in favour of one who had suffered only for courage and loyalty. The Countess sent Sir William de Montacute in haste to Windsor, where the King then was, exhibiting these matters, having no question as to the answer. But her mortification was the greater when William returned with this message in his mouth — That the King's grace would consider of the exchange with the Countess in person, and not otherwise. Needs must that she go to Court, therefore; a thing which (in the absence of her lord) she had never yet done.

"She made herself ready with haste, and before Saint John's Day, so much speed her zeal did lend

her wit, set out with the proper retinue of an Earl's lady, with her husband's two sons, Lancelot their governor, with William de Montacute and the household. She finds the Court to be at Eltham; she attires herself nobly in silk and jewels, looks like the new moon, so thin, so clear and bright; she takes a lad by either hand, is announced by heralds, falls at the King's feet. 'Sire, I am here,' saith she; and the King, 'I have grown old crying for you.' He taketh her up and kisseth her fondly: 'Alack, too fond!' she thinks. He maketh her sit by him upon his high seat: 'Alack, too high, too high!' is her moan. He reasons with her a long time in a low but ardent voice about matters which should need but one nod of the head. She, all tremulous, dares not think of her danger in view of her lord's necessity; she urges, implores, shows tears, looks lovely, melts the King's heart to water. He hints a bargain, she is silent; he expounds it, and then she holds up her young head. 'My lord, my lord,' says she, 'I perceive that my husband is better in the French King's prison. And to that effect I will write to him.' Says the King, 'Madame, you are too hard with me: I did but try you. You shall write to the Earl, saying that for his sake I give up the Sieur de Châteaudun—for his sake and for yours.' 'Sire,' replied the Countess, 'I will tell him that it is for his sake, and gladly, gladly believe it.' 'Do you fear his anger then,' asks the King, 'that you will be silent about your part?' 'No, Sire,' she replies; 'but my husband has fought and suffered for you; and I would not have him think that you forget

what he has done on account of what I have not done — and should have done.'

"'Ah, what have you not done that you should have done, dear madame?' the King asks her with tenderness. She replies, 'Sir, I have not done you long service. I have not marred my face with warfare; nor grown old in prison for my King's cause.' 'Farewell, dear madame,' says the King; 'I shall send letters to France without delay.' She withdrew with Lancelot and the boys. The King kept his promise, not for the Earl's sake by any means, and not for the sake of the Countess; no, but because she had shamed him into it. But Otho de Grandison, anxious man, saw very well that if dishonesty were to be reaped in the Countess, it must first be sowed in the Earl. And he remembered where lay the King's ruby hid.

"The Earl came home in May, a little, keen, fiery-faced man, with sharp black eyes like pins' heads. He was old, rather twisted, fussy, choleric, stood greatly on punctilio. The first thing he asked about was the education of his sons, the second, concerning the King's disposition towards his house; the third, of the state of his revenues. The Countess made him a loving welcome, as her duty and good heart prompted, and was glad to be able to satisfy him. All the accounts of his castles, manors, demesnes, chases, warrens, parks, forests, fishings, free-and-bond lands, were in fair order; his money in stronghold, or put out at good interest with the Lombards and Florentines; his horses were in stall and his cattle in byre. His sons had made diligent progress in

study: he was well pleased with all that he found, and said so. The King made exorbitantly much of him, and caused him to come every day to Court. For his sake, as he was led to understand, the Countess was appointed to a post of great honour at the Queen's side: so the King saw her as often as he pleased, and the oftener he saw her the more pleased he was. You will readily guess that this lady, who had acted with such rare discretion in her husband's absence, did not weary in well-doing now that he was at home again. No fault could be found in her, she made no slip, she gave no sign, but kept the flag of her courage and honour floating free. Even when the King affected to find (whereas he had obtained from Nicole) one of her garters, and hung upon it a great and high Order of Chivalry, she faltered not, lowered not her crest. The Earl her husband, it must be owned, was not too well pleased: he thought the King carried favour too far. Yet, sharply as he watched, he could not believe his wife in fault; and the King had a noble way of frankness, a brave simplicity in all such doings, which disarmed jealousy at the outset. When tongues went into cheeks, when fools took heart to mock, when eyes looked askance, when brows made arches at this fact, 'Shame upon the knight who shamefully thinketh!' cried our lord the King, and held aloft the blue girdle for all to see. Nobody after that dared suppose, and least of all the honest Earl, that any evil heat blew forth such breath."

"It was finely done in the King," said Captain Brazenhead.

"Do you think so?" says the Scrivener. "I say that it was finely conceived. But wait a little, for now I bring you to a new move in this game which I declare to have been greater than chess: the move of that anxious man the lord Otho de Grandison; who, deeming himself the close ally of the King's, to rise when he rose and fall if he failed, thought fit to sow the seeds of suspicion in a worthy man. To the good Earl of Salisbury came this Otho by night, saying, 'Heard you ever the like of this? The King's finger goes naked.'

"'Ha!' says the Earl, not knowing what else to say, and weary by anticipation of the man.

"'I mean,' says this Otho, 'that he hath lost, or otherwise rid himself of the great balass ruby which Tancred King of Sicily gave to King Richard Cordelion; and I think,' says he, 'I think that he hath given it away.'

"'Oh, like enough,' says the Earl; 'he is a very generous prince.'

"'But he worketh deep,' says Otho, 'and getteth his profit better than any. I suppose that this ring is now in a lady's neck.'

"'And a good place for it, *pardieu*,' says the Earl without a blink, 'if so be that the neck is a fair one.' But Otho continued, 'Well, well, if the King may wear a lady's garter, I suppose that a lady may wear his ring.' And now the Earl blinked sure enough, and asked Otho very shortly what he meant.

"Said Otho in return, 'All I know for certain is this, that when the King was at your Castle of Wark in the winter, he had the ring, and now he hath it not.'

"The Earl turned upon him. 'Do you know anything, you Grandison?' he asked him, with clenched teeth. 'Or do you presume to draw at random, reckless whether your sister be in the way or not?'

"'By my head,' says Otho, 'you wrong me, Earl of Salisbury. I believe my sister's woman Nicole hath the ring.'

"'I bid you good evening, my lord,' says the Earl, very stately. Otho went his ways.

"Yet he had sown mischief in a fair fallow, as the Devil also sowed in Christ's. The Earl sends for the woman Nicole and straitly questions her. She, as the way is of women of her condition, begins to cry, protesting her innocence and virtue never impugned before. Pressed harder, she confesses that she did receive the ruby from the King's grace, and that her mistress now hath it in her coffer. The Earl sent her away, and went himself to his wife's bedchamber. She was in bed asleep, but he woke her up (not rudely) and asked for the keys of her strong coffer. She told him where they should be found, would have gone to get them for him, but he told her to stay where she was. She did not ask him any reasons for what he did, seeing that, in her eyes, all his doings were reason enough. After a little he came back, with a torch in one hand, the King's great ruby burning in the other.

"'Look at this ring, madame,' he said, 'and tell me whose it is.'

"She replied, 'It is the King's, my lord. I saw it on his finger at Wark, and he would have wagered it to me in a game of chess; but I would not.'

"'I found it in your coffer,' said the Earl. 'Lie down in your bed again until I require you.' So said, he went out to find Nicole; but this time he went with a birch-rod in his hand, at mere sight of which the woman confessed all that she knew or had done. She told him of the words wherewith the King had given her the jewel, That if any one at any time remarked it, she was to say that the King had begged Madame Alys to accept it in remembrance of a happy game. She said also that nobody had remarked it, not even Madame Alys herself, and so the words had never been spoken. 'By the Rood of Grace,' says the Earl, 'there was more than chess at Wark.'

"Being a reasonable man, he thought it not good to see the King; being a sensible man, he found it not possible to meet again his wife without rage; being an honest man, he went away from London, giving out that he had business in his lands. Days passed, and weeks, a whole summer time, but he came not to Court. As for the Countess, she reproached herself greatly that she had not sooner discovered the ring and returned it; and to Nicole, her woman, whose duty it was to take out the jewels she might happen to call for, she spoke very sharply, saying that she must have seen the thing lying there and known that it had no business there to be. But Nicole, who desired above everything else that the affair should blow over, vowed by all the Saints in the Calendar, both the red and the black, that she had never remarked it at all. The Countess could not prove it against her, nor find anything in her own conscience which called

for weeding out. Her heart cried for her husband's return, that it might be justified; meantime, she must go on as she had ever done. She occupied herself, therefore, with her duties at home and abroad, avoided the King and the King's friends as much as she could, avoided especially her brother Otho, whom, without conscious reason, she distrusted, and leaned more and more upon Master Lancelot, the governor of her stepsons. This was a very silent young man. In company dumb, awkward, and morose, over his charges his ascendancy was assured; betwixt him and his mistress lay absolute faith. I believe that she knew nothing of his heart, and credit her with caring nothing for it at this time; nevertheless, with reason or without, she leaned upon him in her troubles, chose his company before any other, made herself snug with him and the boys, had him only to read to her of evenings, or walked in the gardens by the Thames, up and down the grass alleys, holding his arm. Very little was said between them, I fancy; nothing of what was wounding her in secret was ever broached by him. But if he was sick she divined it, if sad she gave him silent, tender comfort. She liked to think herself sister of this learned, continent youth; more than once it was on the tip of her tongue (which ran on when at ease) to speak of her uneasiness. None knew it better than he: yet she withheld the news, so the disquiet bit inwards and corroded in her warm heart. You are not likely to suppose this Lancelot without eyes. Good Lord, the man loved her deplorably. Hanging (as he must) about the Court, watching

the King's preoccupation, the importunity of the King's friends, the flattering knees of all those courtiers who prey upon the minions of princes; observing most of all (with a heart of lead) the fat smiling, the slippery hands, the liquid back of Sire Otho de Grandison — he suffered the tortures of the damned. 'O Lord, this nasty snake will lick my dove!' he groaned within himself, and agonized, and could do nothing. So the time wore, with the Earl away in the West, the Countess ill at ease; the King idle, full of dishonest thought. But Otho was far from idle.

"I shall tell you now, companions, of the Earl's last tournament: as thus: —

"About the feast of Saint Michael and the Angels, our lord the King proclaimed a great tournament to be held in the Moorfields by London, whereat himself and his friends, De Grandison, Badlesmere, Pembroke, Sir Walter Manny, and others would hold the field against all comers. The Queen of Beauty at this festival, the holder of the Crown, the cynosure and pleasant Goad to great Gestes was to be Madame Alys, Countess of Salisbury, who most unwillingly usurped the place of the true Queen, Madame Philippa, a noble-hearted though unpleasing lady. She, as luck must have it, was in Flanders at the time, visiting her blood-relation the Count of Hainault; therefore Madame Alys, because she knew not how honourably to refuse the King what he asked her with great insistence on honour, consented — but with tears. Her friend Lancelot had no

comfort to give her. 'Help me here, Lancelot,' she had said, with a gentle hand on his shoulder. 'By my head, madame, I cannot advise you in a King's matter.' 'Then you have no love for me, Lancelot.' Whereupon he fiercely, 'Why, what right have I to give you love?' She could not answer him any more than she could answer the King.

"On the day set apart, the lists were marked out and hung with white, green and yellow; the Castle was prepared with the banners of England and France, and a fair tribune displayed midway of the career with a bower of red and white roses upon it; wherein sat the dark-haired Alys in a red gown powdered with silver moons, and on her head a crown of white flowers. All about her were noble ladies and virgins, wives and daughters of princes, dukes, earls and viscounts, with pages — among whom the two sons of the Earl her husband — and esquires of honour. All the chivalry of England was there to joust.

"Very great fighting was very cheerfully accomplished in this glorious field. Many knights became acquainted with the dust, some became dust; many lost their helms, but none their hearts, except in the way of love, and that most of them had done already. And then, lo! in the afternoon, about three o'clock, a herald at the gate proclaimed the high, noble and excellent prince and lord, my Lord William Earl of Salisbury, come in arms to face the Castle. And the King's herald let cry (by the King's command), 'Your lord the Earl shall have what he desires.' So the Earl of Salisbury, bravely armed, rode in upon

a great horse, a squire on either hand, one to carry his spear, the other his shield. The fair Countess was seen to have eyes for none but her husband, though she never failed of courtesy to those about her. As for the King, he greeted the Earl fairly as if he knew nothing of his goings or comings (which indeed he did not for a certainty), and was gravely saluted in return. My lord Otho de Grandison did not appear in the lists, and was no more seen that day, save by one.

"One by one the King's friends jousted with the Earl, and one by one were discomfited. Then came forth the Black Prince, the noblest young man, I suppose, that had been in England since King Richard's day. With him, to the wonder of all, the Earl refused to fight. 'My Prince,' said he, 'I am of your party always: I will never fight with you.' The Prince laughed to hear him, and said, 'Fight with my father, then, my lord Earl, if I am not man enough.' 'Too much man, my Prince,' says the Earl. 'But I will tilt against our lord the King gladly, so far as I may with honour.' Upon this rode out the noble King Edward himself, very splendid in his gilded armour, and saluted the Earl of Salisbury.

"'You will tilt with me, fair lord?' he asked.

"'I will indeed, Sire,' replies the Earl; 'but first a word in your private ear.'

"'Speak, man,' says the King. The Earl went very close, and showed the King his ruby.

"'Do you know this, Sire?'

"'Perfectly well. It was mine until I lost it at play. How got you it?'

"'I may not tell you, Sir,' says the Earl; 'but I will make good my title to it here and now, if God judge fairly of my cause.'

"'God will work His will,' said the King; 'I am sure of that. Make you ready, my lord.'

"Three careers they tilted, more fiercely than king and vassal should. In the first the King bore down the Earl, in the second the Earl the King. In the third they broke their spears, and were parted. Entering his tent, the King says to De Grandison, 'The Earl hath the ruby I gave to Madame Alys. This frets me sorely.' 'Sire,' replies De Grandison, 'have at him in the *melée* and win it of him.' 'No, no,' said the King, 'I will fight him no more, lest I have to reproach myself with the hurt of a good man. But after the tournament, Otho, do you find me the Earl and bring him in.' 'I will bring him, Sire,' says Otho, 'or the ring.' 'One, the other, or both,' the King said; 'I care not which.'

"The *melée* followed, in which the King did not fight — and rightly, since this is a very perilous thing, and the King's person no more to be regarded in it than a common person's, when all are heated and blind with dust. Moreover, it is the time of times to wreak private vengeances, fight out private quarrels, cover all kinds of sin. But all the King's party were there, and among them De Grandison secretly; yet not so secretly but that Lancelot observed him, or (rather) observed that the numbers of that side were full. Now, he knew that the King would not be in the *melée*, and much wondered who it could be that stood in his place. Afterwards he wondered the more

earnestly, and in time understood. For in the midst of the clamour there was a piercing cry from the Countess, 'Alas, alas, my dear lord!' and then from the knights another cry, 'The Earl of Salisbury is down!' The Countess turned grey where she fell and was carried out. When they came to take up the body of the Earl her husband, they found it short of a finger in addition to other wounds which it had. Here was a sorrowful ending to a glorious day. The good Earl of Salisbury was dead, thinking injuriously of his young wife; she, poor soul, was widow before she could hope to have been mother; and a lad of sixteen years old laid upon suddenly by the hand of God to be a peer of England and a prince. They bore the body of the Earl to his palace in the Strand, and laid it among torches in the chapel. Six priests said six masses every morning, but the Countess would never go near the place. She sat alone, without tears, saying to all who came to her, 'He hated me, and thought me wicked. If I went near him now his wounds would spit blood at me —and I dare not.' But she sent Lancelot daily to see how he looked, and every time that he came back, reporting, 'There is peace upon his face and sure knowledge of the truth,' she shook her head and motioned with her lips to make the words, 'He thinks me vile, and I am vile.' So they buried the Earl without any last look from her who had served him so well.

"The King, having his ring back at the hands of De Grandison, looked shrewdly at him as he asked, 'How got you that, Otho?' The other replied, 'My lord, when the Earl was dead, I

thought it no robbery to take what was never his.' And he was questioned no further.

"Now," said the Scrivener, after an impressive pause, "you shall hear me make an end of this history, when I have told you, how a pawn gained a queen, and gave the King check."

"By the soul of any dog," says Captain Brazenhead, who had seen whereabouts by this time were the hands of Percival Perceforest and Mawdleyn Touchett. "By the soul of any dog, Scrivener, I know what you are going to say."

"You know nothing at all, it seems to me," said the Scrivener; "kindly be quiet."

"Now," he went on, "you shall understand that after the death of the Earl, the King was most discreet towards the widowed Countess — discreet with the discretion of a dog that waits for a bone; for though he never moved during the days of her retirement, he let it be seen that he was ready to go as far as a king can go. There was an air of 'as you will have it, but — ' in all his dealings; more than that, he had the young Earl girt with his father's sword and brought to Court the moment the funerals were over, thinking (O guile that love lends!), 'Her anxieties for him will bring her after.' As indeed they did. Determined as ever she had been that the young man should walk as his father had desired, she took up her duties again about the Queen's person within the week after her widow's seclusion.

"Here I say, Alas, that our honest motions often prove the means of dishonesty in others! This youth, the door of the world flung open before his

tender eyes, was (as it were) blinded and made drunk by the glory revealed. As he learned to walk in it he fancied himself a personage; he paid court where he thought courtship was due, he worked to advance himself, loved to be modish, found the sweets of his stepmother insipid beside the wine of the King's sons. From them he learned the tired vices of kings, with them appraised all women by the measure of them that are no women at all; from them he learned how out of measure the King himself favoured his stepmother. Soho! thought this solemn-foolish, old-young man. Soho! What a scaling-ladder for the house of Montacute; and how fumblingly did our father go about his building! In his sagacious mind he turned the thought over and over: 'The more she favours the King, the more he favours us.' To whom then should the poor woman turn? The mind of her brother Otho she knew too well, soon the mind of her stepson Salisbury she dared not read, lest she should come to know that also. She turned her pleading eyes to God; and, praying so, she turned her worn, pure cheek to Lancelot's view; and as his heart bled at the sight, so the blood boiled as it flowed. Some dark design was afoot, he considered: he remembered the man in the *melée* (not the King), and the Earl's maimed hand. The Earl had found the King's jewel, and had worn it: who had it now? Who had cut off a finger to have it? That man had cut more than a finger, he judged; he had cut the thread of a noble life. Why, you ask me, did he not tell these things to the Countess? For this reason, that he loved her more than his life, dearly, all

day and all night. 'If I tell her half the truth,' he said to himself, 'I may shock her into my arms. God forbid that I should try to serve her with an unclean will.' Therefore he suffered apart, wasting to see her suffer; and the very depth of his love kept him dumb before her. She often came to him to consult him, trusted him above all men. He could give her little help, since his tongue was tied to his heartstrings. She thought him weary of her, thought him harsh in judgment, sighed to see him estranged. Alack, he took her wages, and loved her: what else could he do but keep strange?

"After Christmas matters came to a head. The King, infatuated beyond belief, heaped honour upon honour before her feet. Unheard-of fact in chivalry, he gave her the Order of the Garter! Upon her arm she wore that first mark upon her fair name; nor could she do otherwise, since the King publicly invested her. He gave her good manors, castles, towns, tolls and markets, profits of the sea, profits of the earth and the bowels of the earth. She was feasted, sung, done homage, courted by the great who would be greater, adored by the simple who aped the great. So one day in this time of stormy worship the lightning blared upon her, the sky split open; she saw depth within depth of ruin, shame, shock and depravation. In a word, her stepson the young Earl came to visit her, and made bad truth worse by ill-telling. She could not stop him, she could not answer him, she was cut to the quick of the heart. But she called for a cup of water, being white and faint, leaning by the wall; and when this dolt had run to fetch it, she stumbled, sick and blind and hunted, from the

room, and felt her way by the walls to Lancelot's oratory, where that young man was praying before a little altar.

"As he turned his head he saw his beautiful mistress come wavering towards him, her hands held out for some stay; so scared and white, so open-mouthed before misery, flickering so like a blown flame, so distraught, so much younger than she could have been — he thought her dead, and this her unquiet ghost.

"'What dost thou with me, spirit?' he whispered on his knees.

"'O Lancelot, O Lancelot!' she wailed, and ran and fell upon him, and clung fast to his shoulders.

"He put her in the only chair there was, knelt beside her, stroked her to calmness. After much shivering and moaning, she became very drowsy; so he laid her on his bed, and for fear her rest should be disturbed, locked the door. In an hour or more of time, whereas she still slept soundly, he heard in the passage the beginnings of rumour, the steps of many feet, persons running, searching, talking together; then sudden pause; in a profound hush the quick steps of one man; then the sharp voice of the King. 'Lord Jesus, now help thy servants,' said he; 'they will certainly wake my mistress. It will be better for me,' he considered, 'to unlock the door and meet her enemies in the gate. As they have done evil, so they can imagine nothing but evil.' So thought, so done; he unlocked the door, opened it wide, went down the corridor, and knelt before our lord the King, who with young Salis-

bury, Otho de Grandison and some other one or two held debate in the armoury. 'Sire,' says this Lancelot, 'my lady is asleep, and it were better that she saw not your Grace.'

"'Who may you be, young man?' says the King; and Lancelot on his knees, 'I am one, my lord King, who speaks the truth from a very full mind.'

"'A pest, fellow, on your mind!' says the young Earl of Salisbury to his late governor: for this is the way of the suddenly aggrandized, that they think meanly of those that have not outstripped them.

"'Be silent, sir,' said the King greatly: 'this is no way to use to gentlemen in any company.' To Lancelot, 'Get up, my friend,' says he, 'and speak your mind.' Answers him Lancelot, 'Nay, Sire, by your leave; but what I have to say must by all means be said on my knees.' 'As you will,' says the King, 'but be brief.'

"'Sire,' said Lancelot, 'so I will. My dear mistress, four months widowed of a noble gentleman, hath this day suffered a great shock. What that may be, let my late master's son inform your Grace; or if he choose silence for his part, as I suppose he will, let my lord Sire Otho de Grandison take up his parable.'

"'Speak, Earl of Salisbury,' said the King. But the young man would not. Otho de Grandison chose otherwise. 'Dear Sir,' says he, 'I guess what this stammering person means, but do not care greatly to sully your mind with his sick distortions. The lady is timid, and close by. A sight of your royal face — remembrance quick-

ened by sight of your royal finger — will hearten her. Let me persuade your Grace to do her so much favour. Afterward she shall bear your cup at dinner, and the wine taste no worse for the wooing of her lips. Shall it be so?' Lancelot saw the ruby on the King's hand, and De Grandison look at it. So then he knew the whole truth as in a flash.

"The King thought for a little, then said, 'Yes, yes, we will certainly see Madame Alys. Lead us, Sir.' This to Lancelot, who stood his ground for all that.

"'Sire,' said the young man, 'I will go to waken my lady, if needs must. And I will tell her, Sire, that the beguiler of Nicole the tirewoman is here, and the undoer of a man's faith by means of a ring; and also the unknown knight who, in the *melée* at Moorfields, slew by a foul stroke my lord the Earl of Salisbury, and cut off a finger of his hand.' He had raised his voice to speak and gathered courage as he went from the greatness of his matter; but now, when he paused, there was a dreadful silence; and presently the King swore, 'Death in life!' and laid a hand to his sword; and next immediately there was a hubbub of voices, with the swishing of swords as they slipped. 'Down with him! cut open his face!' and other such cries rang down the corridor; but Lancelot stood his ground. Then all swords dropped and all tongues were still as the Countess Alys came softly out of the oratory through the open door, and stood by the young man's side. Men marvelled to see the sharpness of her features, to hear the dry whispering of her

tongue. Deeply, deeply, she curtsied to the King.

"'I am here,' she said, 'to welcome Pandarus the First, and Pandarus the Second, my kinsmen. But I bend my knee to the august confidant of Nicole the tirewoman, and prostrate myself to the giver of rings in secret. And as ladies should, I would kiss the hand of the unknown knight who took my husband's life, and cut off his dead finger. Where is this knight, my lord King?' She stood before the King with her arms stiff at her sides; her two fists were clenched, her chin set hard, her eyes dangerously bright. No man answered her.

"After a time of suspense she shut her eyes and began to sway about. 'I am faint, Lancelot,' she said, 'take me back to the oratory; quick, quick.' He supported her with his arm, turned, led her away. Believe me when I tell you that not one man of all that noble company followed or so much as started to follow her; but all stayed where they were, rooted to the ground. When the door of the oratory was shut (but not locked) the King held up his head. 'My lords,' he said, 'I am rightly admonished. That is a very noble lady. And as for the young clerk, I wish I had bishops after that model. Follow me, Sirs.' So he, too, turned and went, they following in silence. But he went the other way.

"Now while his mistress lay with shut eyes upon the bed, Lancelot cast himself before the Crucified to ask forgiveness of heaven for having dared the majesty of his earthly lord. And while he was there at his cold prayers, not yet risen from his knees, this pretty lady slipped off

the bed and came and knelt beside him, as close as she dared, in the soft mood which follows strong exaltation of spirit, her hands folded in her neck, roses burning in her cheeks, her head bent, her bosom not reposing. For a while they knelt tremblingly together, until Lancelot shivered and sighed. His head ached, his fire was gone out in ashes, he was honestly sick, saw no outgate. So then, as he made to get up and resume his dead life of serving days, 'Leave me not yet, Lancelot,' says the Countess in a fluttering whisper; and as he turned she turned; their eyes swam together, she threw herself upon his breast. In a trice his arms had her fast. She said, 'If thou goest I go with thee.'

"'Ah, whither, sweet soul?' he sighs; and she without looking up, tells him, 'To thy heart, Lancelot, to sanctuary there.'

"That night they left London privily by river; and when my informant had news of them last they were in Ghent, a most fond pair of wedded lovers. For he never took up orders, as I dare say you guess."

"I find that they are killing a pig in Alresford," said Richard Smith the shipman, after a little. He knew not what else to say, and it was perfectly true. The arm of Percival Perceforest slipped down from Mawdleyn Touchett's waist; and the Prioress of Ambresbury praised the tale.

"I am glad your ladyship likes it," said the Scrivener; "for that emboldens me to add that the young man's name was Lancelot Corbet, which is my own name."

"Ha!" cried Captain Brazenhead, "Ha, Scrivener! And he was no mean poet, they tell me. And made other handsome things beside couplets, I'll engage."

"He was my grandfather," said the Scrivener, "and a very fine poet. And Madame Alys de Grandison, Countess of Salisbury, whom a king loved in vain, was my grandmother."

"Therefore," concluded Captain Brazenhead, looking benevolently at the demure Percival, "Therefore, ladies and good sirs, the lowliest of us may aspire, and bright blood make a rough case as soft as silk, hey?" Percival coloured up, but was grateful to his friend.

Then the company, topping the crest, rode in between the tasselled trees which led to the fair town of Alresford on the hill.

DAN COSTARD'S TALE

DAN COSTARD'S TALE

PERCIVAL PERCEFOREST, the second day out, was overheard singing to himself a song which begins,

"Now, Winter, go away,
And hide thy white array,"
Gratiâ Magdalenæ—

and compelled to sing it all. So he did.

When it was done, "Thus women sing women, but not men women," said Smith the mariner to his wife. "Here we have for certain old Brazentop's *mye* tricked as a boy for the road."

"What hast thou to do therein, since I am with thee, honey?" asked she.

"More than saints' love went to the making of that ballad, young gentleman," was the judgment of Dan Costard, the mild old priest from Ambresbury.

"We needs must love as we are able, sir," Percival replied. "And for my part, I hope Saint Mary Mawdleyn will heed my crying, and give me good comfort in the end."

"Do you think it needful to human contention," said the Scrivener, "that man should love maid or maid man?" Plainly Percival thought so.

"*Nennil*," continued the other, "by no means. You will have heard of Narcissus, a fair youth of heathenry, who, seeing his own face reflected in a pool, loved it; madly kissed his own lips, and

falling into his own arms, upon his own bosom was drowned in his own bliss, inexorable self-lover!"

"A wicked imagination of a wicked race of men," says Dan Costard.

"Heh, heh!" cried the Scrivener, "May be. But I can give you a Christian prince in no better state of grace as touching his conduct, though his hope, no doubt, was what Christ made it. This was Harry the well-beloved. Heard you ever of him?"

"What Harry is this? For we live under the sixth of that name."

"We live under the seventh," said the Scrivener, "if I am right. For this Harry was King Harry's eldest son, crowned in his lifetime. He was son of King Harry Short-Coat, the king who in the fierceness of his nature said, 'Rid me of Thomas Beket.' Ah, and they rid him! But they gat him in his room Saint Thomas of Canterbury, towards whom we ride, who ruled him with a longer rod than the Chancellor ever did. Well then, this young Harry loved himself, and so in his own love was drowned. Listen, all of you, to what I say of him."

"By Thomas," said Salomon Brazenhead, "I will not listen. All day yesterday you prated of kings and their affairs. I, who own kings for my familiar divinities, as dwellers upon my very hearthstone, I and my nephew Piers——"

The Shipman scoffed—"His nephew, quod he!"

"And my nephew Thrustwood," continued the Captain with severity—for as Piers Thrustwood

his nephew he had smuggled in Percival Perceforest the beaten lover — "know too much of kings to value your descant upon them. Let us hear of common persons, if you please, with saintliness playing a part, if possible: as to wit, Saint Mary Mawdleyn."

"Well," says the Scrivener, "I will please you if I can." But Captain Brazenhead had not done with him.

"I say further, Scrivener," he went on, "that her ladyship of Ambresbury shall choose the teller of the tale, and not your sufficiency."

"I choose for Dan Costard," says the Prioress at once; "for I believe edification is in the air."

"I am sure of it, my lady!" Percival cried; and Mawdelyn Touchett agreed.

"Speak, old man, speak," said Captain Brazenhead kindly; "I like the looks of thee."

Dan Costard stroked his chin. "Much good may that do me," says he. He perused the blue sky for awhile, spoke to himself, with grunts and sniffs intermixed, apostrophized the Mater Dei, abjured the enemy of mankind; then dug his heels into his horse's ribs, and began,

The Loving History of Peridore and Paravail

"Augustine crieth unto God, 'Behold, O Lord, yea, behold patiently as Thou art wont, how carefully the sons of men observe the accustomed rules of letters and syllables received from elder times, neglecting the eternal covenant of salvation which they have from Thee!' And I say, that they

may observe more than syllables and yet be nearly damned. The tale is all of Blessed Vigilas, hermit of Cauntrip, who dwelt in a wattled hut by Bleme Barrow under the shadow of the Druse Ring, and saw visions and did marvels almost daily, by reason of his fastings, stripes, flagellations, macerations, prayers incessant, and tortures of the abominable flesh. Of the which thaumaturgies and ascetics of his, if I were to begin to tell you, I should speak from here unto Canterbury, and from Canterbury to Chalcedon without rest for refreshment. So I refrain. I choose rather to tell of his dire temptation, and his conflict with old Legion, King of the Devils; of how he fought and how at last prevailed. So the tale is of simple persons; of this Vigilas, of Peridore the shepherd and of Paravail his fosterling, a slip of a girl whose hair was colour of dormice and her feet lighter than a hare's, and her lot more unhappy than, may be, any woman can deserve. For my own part, the more I know of women (saving this company) the less I think they deserve of good or ill fortune; but my part is not the tale's, so I forbear. This gaunt red shell of a man, whom his generation revered as Blessed Vigilas (beatified in his lifetime by the Bishop of Rewish), had lived thirty of his forty years alone under the sky of Cauntrip Plain, a desperate man of God. There was none holier in the shire, nor saint in the hierarchy more worshipped than he by the men of the City of Rewish (who first hailed him Blessed) or by them of the vills, towns, parishes and hamlets of Cleyhungre, Clyst Saint-George, Amberford-Mary, Amberford-Prior, Markgate, Percimere, Shotley and Drem —

villages all of shepherds and hinds, tillers and browsers of the soil, which lie about the grassy sea of Cauntrip: none, I say, more worshipped or with better reason than Blessed Vigilas, hermit of Bleme.

"But such earthly honour is in itself a snare, not the least searching of the Enemy's, or so seems to be. In the thirtieth year of this man's holiness, the twelfth of his beatification, the fortieth of his age, there came to pass, about the day of Allhallows, a terrible storm of thunder, lightning and rain; the which (being a time for warlocks, witches, devils and similar fiends to hold Sabbath in) was the very time for Vigilas to pray abroad. Pray he did, kneeling in torrents of water, like the thunder's self roaring his cries to God and the Archangels. And as he was upon this pious strife, kneeling not far from the dreadful circle of rocks which they of Cauntrip name the Druse Ring, he heard — ah, and he saw in a flash of broad levin two witches fighting in that same Ring; who hopped this way, hopped that way, bounced, shrieked, crouched, scuffled, mewed like cats. The shameful sight, which would have scared a plain man under his bed, called Blessed Vigilas like a trumpet to arms. He went fiercely, directly into the Ring with his hands spread out like our Saviour's on the Cross, and 'Ho!' cries he, 'imps of dark and the Devil, I adjure ye by the Three Holy Children, by the Archangels, Angels, Thrones, Dominions and Powers, cease this hell-cat work!' The horrid couple (one kneeling on the back of the other) laughed; they threw up their long faces to the sky; they screamed like

gulls in the tideway: they laughed, but their mirth was bitter. Confessing, while they mocked, the power of Christ, they flew upwards into the eye of the storm, they vanished, the gale swept them away. Into the Druse stalks Blessed Vigilas, greatly exalted and as if certain of his purpose; upon the slab of sacrifice (which they call the Blood-stone) he finds a babe asleep, all wrapped in a fleece of white wool, warm and snug as the Sacred Child of Bethlehem, Which the Shepherds saw and the holy Kings of Cologne. Blessed Vigilas gave thanks, took the child in his arms and brought it into his hermitage of Bleme. It was a girl child, delicately made, new-born, naked but for the fleece, and (as it proved when awoke) lusty and as hungry for meat as you or I might be, awake at midnight. Holy as the blessed man was, all his holiness skilled him not to feed a babe unweaned. He made milk warm in a pipkin, and the child sucked at his finger like a little leech: this gave him thrills, but the child scanty meat. So as it nozzled in his leather frock, and poked for the nipple and found it not, so as it wailed, Blessed Vigilas learned despair. I know not what stirring of numb old flesh was in him; but this is true, that he felt he would renounce his hope of heaven's bliss to feed this child. This also is true, that through the black night and tail of the storm he fleeted like a deer, over leagues of grass, over hill, over dale, to Amberford-Mary, a four-league course; and ere the laggard day had begun to blink, he knocked at the door of Master Foliot's house, wherein lay Ankeret, that man's wife, newly abed of her first-born son. With her he prevailed

that she should foster his foundling beside her babe, and give a breast to each. She, a good woman, was willing, if so be that Vigilas would christen her son. So Vigilas christened the pair of infants, naming the boy Peridore like his father and grandfather before him, and the girl Paravail. 'For (said the holy man prophetic) *par avail* camest thou into the fold, and *par avail* shall thy soul be saved, and *par avail* thou guard it for thyself.' These things being solemnly done, Blessed Vigilas betook himself to his hut by Bleme Barrow, to his fasting, utter solitude, and prayer.

"Believe it or not, after so much devotion his heart was now empty of devotion. He could not pray at all for thinking of the striving child that had sought to draw milk from him. 'Alack, my God,' he cried, 'is all my thirty years of climbing so little in thy sight that one short hour of love should drag me down?' But God answered him nothing, and Vigilas stayed abashed and empty. For a month of days he battled with his craving, fighting as not often even he had fought before. Terrible visions full of scars and fire he had, awake and asleep. All night the witches screamed about his thatch, or sat upon it talking, sniggering shrilly at his doubts. The Devil also tempted him in the form of a grey dog, which came and lay panting on his doorstep, and snapped at him whensoever he had to pass it. When he kicked it one day it yelped and died. He buried it, but it came again. Again he killed it, and left it unburied. It stank. Nor was this all; but he found himself forsaken. The

wheeling birds on Cauntrip, heretofore his familiars, were now scared off at his sight; the foxes hid themselves, the sheep ran blindly from him, and stood at a distance, stamping the ground. He wrought no miracles; cows died in calf in spite of his prayers, ricks were fired by night, thieves and ravishers went scatheless. Vigilas believed himself cast off by God, whereas the truth seems to be that God was by him cast off; yet all this made him but long more exquisitely for the child. At the end of a bare month of days, unable to endure himself, he sped again over the downs to Amberford-Mary, and in spite of all Mistress Ankeret could say took from her the child Paravail and brought it to his hut at Bleme: look at that then, a child suckled for a bare month! Yet he took it home.

"There with prayer, with sweat, with inordinate groaning, with a wooden spoon, he did in some sort rear this treasure of his; through him or in spite of him it grew in grace and favour, healthy and strong and without visible speck. Soon there was no child in all the edges of the plain so fleet and fearless as this. For, by reason that from her earliest hour she had had wide Cauntrip for a playground, she became as one of the denizens thereof, ran with the hares, hid with the foxes, played with them under the moon. She swam like an otter, lurked with mallards in the reedy pools, knew all the birds and could call them about her. The sheep loved her well, the sheep-dogs did her no harm: with all the soulless creatures she seemed sib, only with men and women there was no commerce for her. Such

(if by chance they happened upon the wild girl) ran quickly from her sight; but indeed she saw none of account, save Vigilas himself, and him, as she grew from babe to girl, now she drew and now she drove away. Now one way, now the other, so it was. He loved her, he feared her; he hoped of her, he despaired. You ask me of his inward thought? It was this, I think: She was his child *par avail.* He who had abjured every living thing for his own soul's sake, was now in peril of renouncing that same precious soul for a thing which seemed soulless itself.

"For so she manifestly appeared — this Paravail — as she grew up beautiful, strong, swift as a stag. She spoke, but (as it seemed) parrot-wise, by rote; she repeated what he taught her, prayed with him, lauded God and the Angels, cursed Legion and the fiends. But strive as he might, and he strove incessantly, not one sign did she give that she loved God and hated Legion, that she desired the society of the Angels, shunning that of the fiends. 'Either I nourish a soulless woman,' said Blessed Vigilas to God, 'or Thou has let a devil come tempting me in sweet guise.' So he fell to praying all night, while Paravail lay calm-breathing on her bed of brake. No answer came down from Heaven. He saw her arise in her wild beauty with the first light of day, and flit abroad to play with the beasts or what else might lurk secret in the hollows of the hills; and he remained at home to beat his heart, thus to hammer at the door of Heaven, to hope against hope, to love and to fear.

"Now, this was the way of life with the hermit

and his maid until she was a grown girl of nubile age, the most lovely upright thing in breath. Her hair was long and colour of a dormouse, her shape that of a gracious woman, her skin like that of the peach upon the wall whose hot glow is dusted with bloom. Bare-headed, bare-armed, bare-legged she went her heedless ways, clad only in a leather frock after the fashioning of Blessed Vigilas himself; and neither heat of summer, nor frost, nor deep snow, nor terrible tearing wind did her any harm at all, but instead ripened her, so that she grew golden thereby, and supple, and satin-skinned, and straight as a sapling tree. In vain did Vigilas call her before him night and morning, and make her stand with her hands behind her back while he told over her parts and the evil nature thereof. In vain did he touch her chest, saying, 'This deep case hideth a heart black as all women's hearts must be, and rotten;' or again her two bright eyes, saying, 'These dark pools see nothing but evil and reflect nothing but evil again: so evil looketh on evil and, believing it good, is horribly deceived;' or her red mouth, with the words, 'Hence proceed leasing, and provocation to evil-doing, and slander, and backbiting, and words of malice and all guile.' In vain, I say, in vain! She repeated the words, she seemed meek, soothfast, chastened, obedient; but the words once rehearsed, she was off and away, and he saw nothing more of her until she was hungry or wishful to sleep.

"Going thus, growing thus, out of all control of old Vigilas, though never out of his fierce heart, she was espied one day by her fosterling of a month,

young Peridore Foliot, a dark-hued lad, as he lay keeping sheep upon the plain; and he, who had never seen her, but often heard other shepherds report concerning her wild ways, wooed her with his pipe to draw near, and so (even as she herself could charm a starting bird) drew her in and in, till at last she came and sat beside him, and touched his garments and his hair, and wondered over him and smelt at him; and so, looking deeply into his eyes, let him put hands upon her and take her by the chin, and kiss her cheeks and mouth. Whereupon, as at a first draught of new wine, she fell at once to love him out of measure, and did love. This was the beginning also of manhood for Peridore, a tall lad, first born of honest people, a good boy and a pious; for (as you know better than I) manhood beginneth by self-knowledge, and self-knowledge came by sin. I think Peridore did no piety here, to meet this elfin thing in secret and stray with her upon the windy downs: better to have kept the sheep, with his pipe in his bosom. Withal, what he did was no great affair to hurt her. His honesty saved hers from disaster. In all innocence (as being soulless) she would have suffered what in the heat of youth he might have done; but unless it be a wrong to love that which hath little wit, he wronged her not.

"Paravail got a new master, as you see, with softer lessons and a softer mouth; but she learned little more. 'Repeat with me, dear Paravail, what I shall rehearse,' saith Peridore to her. 'God I fear, Christ I glorify, to Mary's knees I cling, to the Saints I lift up my voice.' She said all the words after him, dully at first, but brighten-

ing towards the close, for she knew what was coming then. 'Say now, Paravail —' he began; and she stopped him there and said the words herself — 'I love, I love, I love Peridore' — and put up a kindling face to be kissed. And he always kissed her fondly, believing what she had said. Perfect love, however, should be perfect understanding; but when Peridore expounded what he knew of duty, of his parents, of his faith as a Christian, she pouted, sulked, or ran away, and must be coaxed back by the pipe and held by endearments to his side. The pipe's music was magic to her; by that Peridore had tamed her at first, through that he had her at his call by night or by day.

"It was long before Blessed Vigilas found out what had wrought a great change in Paravail. He saw her ill at ease, cowed, dull, timorous before him; he saw her all quivering to be away to the open, wakeful, starting, full of dreams at nights. When he questioned her she evaded him, when he reproved her she wept. He believed her to tell lies; some strange thing (he knew very well) had taught her to be shifty. Not as yet did he suspect the Devil, least of all a lover; but rather he judged that the rooted old wickedness of women was sending up a flowering shoot in this young flesh. 'Alas, she hath a soul then,' he reasoned, 'and it is full of the maggots of sin. Whereas before she did not understand, now she understands too well. What shall I do, that have devoted fifteen years of life to the care of a wicked woman?' Observe, that while he yet deceived himself he could no longer deceive the girl. She, by the new light

she had, read him through and feared him the more; he, with all his strong flame, could read less than at first. Now then, one night as he knelt at his holy exercise (thinking to deceive his God as he deceived himself), while she lay abed, he heard the notes of a shepherd's pipe without, played low. He saw Paravail start, knew that she listened; as the music went on — a secret, plaining air — he perceived that she trembled and turned about, that she was broad awake, in a fever to be out, pretending to be asleep all the while. So Love which had made her full of wiles, filled him also with wiles. Vigilas went out of the hut, hid himself in the Druse Ring. Peering thence between the great heeling stones, he saw young Paravail, slim and fair in a full bath of the moon's light, flit out of the hut, standing tiptoe to look about her, then flash like a swallow to where the music called her. Down the lit acres he saw her go: himself, lightfooted as a stag, coursed after. He saw her top a ridge of grass bleached white by the moon; he watched her flying down the slopes beyond: desperate, he followed. He lost her by a little grove of trees, in a bottom where there was a brook, and fern grew rank, with foxgloves intermixed. But over the brook the trees stood clustered on dry sandy ground, and there he saw her again — and one with her. He saw a tall smocked shepherd stand alone: thither also came Paravail with a quick glad cry, who threw herself upon his breast, and touched his face with tender hands. Lying deep in the brake, he saw much more than this, and what evil was not done his evil thoughts conceived: though it had

been pitchy dark his eyes would have burned a path through the night. Love had him gripped by the shoulders; love had his heart in both hands and was gnawing it with strong teeth. Blessed Vigilas, man of God, forty years' hermit on Cauntrip, teacher of all the country, was himself in school. Blessed Vigilas was lover of young Paravail, the more desperate in that his days were many, the more consumed with desire in that desire had been so long forbid. Jealousy, love's naughty friend, now lifted up a head; jealousy, which makes a man see his own wickedness in what he wickedly loves, and wreck the thing that he longs for, lest another should dare to possess it.

"What did Vigilas? He ran away at first. Lying upon his face alone on the down, his soul became a battle-acre for angels and fiends.

"'She is mine, mine, mine!'

"'*Nay, sinner, but all are Mine.*'

"'Shall I not save this poor child, whom once I saved before?'

"'*Nay, sinner, save thyself.*'

"'It is lawful for me to wed, O my God.'

"'*Out on thee, wretch, what hast thou to do with a wife?*'

"'By my soul, O Lord, I will never let her go!'

"'*How wilt thou save her and thyself too? Choose.*'

"'What if I know myself strong enough to do it?'

"'*What strength is in thee now, fond wretch?*'

"'If she tempteth me, Lord, so sorely, it is because she hath a devil.'

"'*What then, Vigilas, My son?*'

"'Lord, by thy grace I have been strong.'

"'*Tempt Me not, Vigilas, My son.*'

"'Lord, I shall take her back to Bleme and exorcise this devil that she hath. For look Thou, Lord, if she hath a devil she will involve this poor silly shepherd in her flame of fire.'

"'*See to it, Vigilas, that she involve not thee.*'

"'She is mine! I saved her from the witches. She hath been my light and joy these many years. And shall another take her now?'

"'*Alas for thee, Vigilas.*'

"'I take her, Lord. I save her from this death.'

"'*Thou art to choose.*'

"'O Christ, I love her!'

"'*Is this thy choice?*'

"Vigilas got up and faced the great night. The moon had gone in: it wanted two hours of dawn.

"'I choose,' he said to God in the dark. 'The soul I saved shall be saved still. If she is a devil I will fight with her. If a devil hath in her his seat I will drive him out. I know very well that she tempteth me to sin; but that is my opportunity delivered from of old. O my God, great and marvellous things have I wrought this forty year five: now I will do a greater than all when I take home with me this lovely fiend; and look and long, but curse her; and love, but chastise; and fear, but dare her do me harm. Now, O God, Thou shalt be content with Thy servant. Is it not so? Answer me.' But God answered him nothing; but all the muffled hills and all the stars stood

motionless in their places. Blessed Vigilas strode again over the grass to the brook in the valley, gathering blindness and rage as he went. By the grey dawn light he saw Peridore and Paravail asleep, her head upon his shoulder, her face thrown up towards his so that her lips brushed his cheek. They had done no harm, but innocently, after their gentle kind: yet he, being filled with insane rage, saw wickedness ruining their faces, and devils everywhere, writhing and knotting in that place.

"The noise of his fierce feet breaking through the fern woke Paravail, who went all cold and began to shake, clinging to Peridore. Then he also awoke, jumped up and stood before old Vigilas. 'Blessed sir,' says he, 'if it please you to hear it, I have found again Paravail, my fosterling for a month, and now would ask her of you for my dear wife.' 'Down, hound,' roared Vigilas, 'lest I strike thee down.' He took Paravail by the wrist and pulled her up, and cuffed her three times on the head. As she flinched and cowered sideways to avoid him, 'The fiend in thee is wide awake, I see,' he says, 'but I will drive him out. Thou spreadest thy nets very wide, but I will slit them in pieces. I will save thy soul in spite of Legion and all his company. Come in, come in, thou abhorred, and do thy worst with me.' So he haled her away, breathing hard through his close nostrils; and Peridore followed after, anxious, miserable, horribly afraid of Vigilas, but bound by the same cords about his neck to go where Paravail should draw him. See all three wretches in a concatenation: Vigilas roped to

Love, Paravail snatched by Vigilas, Peridore in Paravail's net. Deplorable state of affairs!"

"*Improbus ille puer; crudelis tu quoque mater*," quoth the Scrivener at this point: but Percival would not let go Mawdleyn's hand.

Dan Costard resumed:—

"Vigilas dragged Paravail back to Bleme and shut the door upon her and himself. Peridore sat down against the wall, his chin upon his bare knees, and so stayed. There reigned an enormous weight of silence over the plain: the dawn came unheralded by cry of bird; within the hut was silence absolute. At noon Vigilas came out to pray as his custom was, to pray and scourge himself. This day, as he plied the goad with more frenzy than his wont, Peridore cried out for mercy. 'Ah, have mercy, have mercy, Vigilas! Have mercy on thyself—and on all of us!' was his plea; but Vigilas shook the blood off his face and hair to look at him, and then said, 'Thus I score deep the proud flesh which is my gaol.' Little enough flesh was there, God wot; yet he cut it to furrows. Now, the door of the hut was ajar, and Peridore peered into the dark entry, hoping to see Paravail crouching there. But he saw nothing. Presently Vigilas gave over his discipline, and went down to the well for water, but before he went shut the door and rolled a great stone in front of it. No sooner is he round the house than Peridore is at the door, tapping, scratching, calling 'Paravail, Paravail, Paravail, my love!' Her voice, very small and far off, begs him go away and never see her again. Peridore laughs in his misery, putting up his face like a

dog, that howls at the light. Back comes Vigilas with a bucket of water and finds Peridore with his mouth at the bobbin of the latch. He gives a short cry, drops the bucket. 'Prying dog!' he snarls (like a beast); he catches the lad by the scruff of his neck and hurls him with fury to the ground. 'Ah, night-thief, beware of me!' Peridore crawled away, ashamed and hurt, and lay at a distance looking at Vigilas his enemy; but so soon as the hermit was within doors, back he crept to his post by the door. As for Vigilas, mindful of the grey dog of old, which was the Devil in a mean shape, he was sure that he should see Peridore again.

"Now began Blessed Vigilas to cry upon the fiend to come out of Paravail, with a roaring sound as of a mighty wind, most terrible to hear. Peridore, pressed to the door, grew cold to the marrow as he listened. Yet not so much the dread crying of Vigilas terrified him as the silence of the girl: not a sound came forth to tell him news of her, what she suffered or what could not suffer. Yea, although there were horrific pauses in the stream of cursing, minutes of time when all nature seemed athrob with the reverberations of the burthen of reproach, not once could he catch a whimper, a moan, a little gasp of catching breath, to tell him that Paravail lived or warn him that she was about to die. To his mind she was so tender and fragile a thing that (thought he) one blast of the trumpet of Vigilas must scare soul from body: had she then died at once? Did the great minatory voice do no more now than chase a flickering ghost about the hut, from corner to

corner thereof? Peridore could bear it no longer, but threw himself at the door, battering with his hands and feet, scrambling, padding against it like a cat at the walls of a well, crying, 'O Vigilas, give over! Spare her, spare her! O Vigilas, for the dear love of God!' He spent and maddened himself in vain; at last fell in a heap by the door, and lay still, as one dead.

"When he awoke it was night, with a full moon. There was Vigilas outside the hut again, digging a pit. Peridore sat up and watched him: by and by it comes into his mind that this is the grave of Paravail which he digs. But he dares do no more than watch. Presently then, the pit being as deep as the knees of Vigilas, he says, 'Oh, Vigilas, she is but a little creature. No need to bury her so deep. For what unfriendly thing would dig her up again? She is friend with all creatures living save thee. Not so deep, Vigilas, not so deep.'

"'You fool,' says Vigilas, pausing with his pick in the ground. 'I dig this pit for myself. Come and help me.'

"'Most willingly,' says Peridore, and took the pick.

"When the pit was up to Vigilas his neck, the hermit says, 'Now help me fetch water.' So they went with buckets to the well, and soon had it brimful of water. Then Vigilas, casting off his leather frock, stood up meagre and naked, covered with scars and matted hair, the edges of his great ribs as sharp under the skin as the edges of knives. 'What now, O Vigilas?' says Peridore, in a quake of fear. For answer Vigilas lifted high his

arms and leaped into the pit. 'Thus, my son,' says he, gasping (for it was icy cold water), 'I do freeze the flesh out of me.'

"'Alack,' says Peridore, 'is the flesh yet so strong in thee, my father?'

"Vigilas said, 'That she-devil in the house tempteth me most horribly.' Peridore began to cry and wring his hands. 'Ah, ah, how can you think it? She is no devil, but pure innocence all through. Oh, sir, oh, blessed man, let her go, let me have her. She is more dear to me than life itself. I must die without her!'

"'I assure you,' said Vigilas, whose teeth rattled together with cold, 'that you could not die better. She is plainly accursed, of the spawning of the fiend. I see it all now.' But Peridore, full to overflow with misery, could not cease whining his prayers for Paravail; and the hermit, having soused himself sodden, got out of the pit, shook the wet off, and went into his house. There he began again to roar, thunder, and exorcise the devil in Paravail, until the whole of Cauntrip shuddered at the noise of his rough music.

"Towards morning this terrible clamour ceased; silence wrapped the world of grass; and on Peridore too fell silence and a heavy swooning sleep. Out of this he awoke to the sound of wicked voices chuckling and sniggering above him. Looking up, he saw two witches on the ridge of the roof; who sat astride it face to face, and obscenely fondled each other. Peridore made the cross upon himself and watched them sideways.

"Says one, cupping the other's chin, 'Fly, Tibby, fly!' But that other, 'Nay, but wait till old

Sanctity hath made an end of Paravail, and mark where he lays her in earth.'

"'Hue!' said the first, 'What good shall she be to us? The lass is without a soul — as yet, as yet!'

"Tib replies, 'You have the right of it. She was only suckled for a month — and that's no time at all. I fought Jean Proudfute for her in a storm fifteen years agone. Then slipped in this old goat and had her suckled by a wife. But Legion stirred him to snatch her away in a month; and the sprout of soul shrivelled. Hue! we shall have her yet.'

"They both laughed together horribly, with a sound like that of hoarse sea-mews. 'This old enemy of ours hath undone himself. He is overreached. We have him fast!'

"'Wait you. Wait you a little; she lives yet,' said the first; and the second, 'We will wait for the night. Come, come!'

"They stretched their heads up into the sky, and nosed all about for the wind, as cormorants do from their wet rocks in the sea. The sun's rays began to stream out from behind the hills. 'Time is,' says the first; 'Kiss me, Tib,' the second: then 'I fly with you.' So they kissed and rose together and flew screaming off, away from the sun; and when they were clear of the Druse Ring they flew low over the ground, like owls.

"Peridore tapped at the door of the hut, needing even the company of the hermit. 'Who is there, in the name of God?' came muttering the voice of Vigilas. 'It is I, Peridore, in the name of God,' says the young man. Presently Vigilas came blinking out.

"'Oh, Vigilas! oh, Vigilas!' says Peridore on his knees, 'Give me news of Paravail.'

"'What is she to thee, fool?'

"'There have been here two witches astride thy thatch,' says Peridore, 'who report that she will die to-night.'

"'She shall be saved this night, by my old head!' cried the hermit, lifting up his hands to Heaven. Then Peridore said, 'Here is the second morning since I have eaten. Give me food, sir, or I also must die.'

"Vigilas asked him, 'Why, what is thy life or death to me?' and Peridore had no answer to that. Nevertheless Vigilas, when he had said his prayers, standing rigid in his water-pit, gave him a hunch of bread. They sat together in the sun, eating.

"'The witches, sir,' says Peridore, 'report of Paravail that she hath no soul, by reason of her short suckling at my mother's breast. How then can she be damned?'

"Vigilas replied, 'But I know that she hath a soul, and a black soul, into which the devil hath entered to possess it. For sure I am that none other but a devil could have tempted me so sorely.'

"'But, sir,' says Peridore, 'how if the devil should have dared enter into thee?' Vigilas stared at him.

"'How can that be?' saith he.

"Peridore says, 'I am a silly, unlearned shepherd, little aware of the ways of holy men of God: yet I seem to have heard say that such have been tempted before now by snares set within. So I

say that the evil we think to find in the world may be of our own devising, as it were. For when I eat too freely and overload my belly, I see the green grass as dust, and blotches in the sweet air. So may it be with other lusts.'

"'Fool,' saith Vigilas, 'you speak as a fool, of your body, but I of spiritual matters wherein only I am learned. What hath the belly to do with the soul?'

"'Why, much,' says Peridore, 'since the soul resides in the body.'

"'I cannot hear thee, I cannot hear thee!' cries Vigilas, perturbed. 'I hear nothing but the snorting of fiends. Off, black thief! I defy thy name!' And he went back fighting his way through the air, and ceased not all that day to cry out and protest against the devil in Paravail. Peridore sat listening to him, with crisped hands and a heart like water, until about the going down of the sun, when the sound suddenly stopped.

"At this time Vigilas came out in a shivery shake, with his jaw dropped (so that his mouth was open and awry), his eyes as pale as skim-milk, all quick with fright. He tried to speak but could not; this gave Peridore an access of terror so sudden that he too was choked in the throat. There then stood the pair of them, the old man and the young, white and shaking, voiceless, eyeing each other. Blessed Vigilas had in one hand a pick, in the other a shovel. These, when Peridore saw them, forced words out of him.

"'Oh, Vigilas,' he said — and his voice was as the voice of one who taps his throat — 'will you make deeper your pit?'

"Blessed Vigilas said, croaking, 'Quick, dig a grave, dig a grave.' Peridore howled.

"'Paravail's grave — oh, oh! Not so, Vigilas?'

"'Paravail's grave,' said the hermit. 'Let us bury her deep.'

"The heart of Peridore stood quite still. He felt the blood ebb from his hands and feet and leave him dry, as when a great suck of the falling tide drains all the sandy pools on a beach. But all this blood surged into his head, and as his brain reeled there eddied into the vortex a little seed of rage, which spread and grew till it possessed him utterly, and showed him Vigilas, and the ground beneath him, the sky, the rocks and all the plain one smouldering sea. Vigilas, looking stupidly at the work on hand, says in his throat, 'Help me dig the grave.'

"'That I will do,' says Peridore.

"'You are young,' says Vigilas, 'and I am old and very weary. Do you take the pick.' Peridore shook at the knees.

"'No, no, no! keep the pick. I will not have it,' says he, quite white.

"'You shall do as I bid you,' said Vigilas, not used to being gainsaid; so he threw down the pick. Peridore took it up. They set to work. Peridore picked up the ground to half a foot or a foot-depth, then gave over while Vigilas shovelled out the loose earth, talking to himself as he wrought. 'Long before she came the devil tempted me' — thus he rambled on — 'in the shape of a grey cur, which lay panting at my door and snapped at me as I went in and out. When I kicked the beast it yelped a little and died. I

buried it, but it came again. I kicked again and it died again. I left it unburied, and it stank. Many weeks this torment endured. Now if I bury Paravail deep, I know very well she will come back, and all our labour be in vain. But I choose rather to bury than to leave her, because of the lovely semblance she hath. Could I endure to see her fretted by worms? O Christ, my King and Lord!' He jumped out of the pit, distraught by his fancies, and said fiercely to Peridore who was watching him, 'Pick up more earth. It is not near deep enough.' Peridore shut his eyes, to hide if he could the glare of blood, and picked up another foot-depth. In his turn Vigilas set to shovelling again. 'She is a very little person,' says he, muttering and complaining over his work, 'whose middle my two hands could span. Yet she should lie all the deeper for that.' He was so hoarse that he could scarcely speak; his breath came short, like a dog's. Now, Peridore felt the veins in his neck swell, and knew that he could not much longer command his rage. So when Blessed Vigilas began again, saying, 'Who would have thought that so much evil could dwell in so slight a body?' Peridore stopped his labour, and cried out hotly, 'Enough. It were better thou saidst no more.'

"'How so?' says Vigilas, ruminating with a foot on his spade's shoulder.

"'I cannot tell thee,' says Peridore, 'but it is true.'

"But Vigilas could not be silent. After a while he began to mutter again, saying, 'This is the sorest trial vouchsafed me yet by God's unspeakable favour.'

"'Beware, Vigilas,' says Peridore.

"'Ah,' quoth he, 'and I have been wary. Fifteen year tempted! First by a sucking child, and then by a pretty imp that played at my knee; and then by a sobering maid that must needs rise up and go to bed in the dark; and then by a slip of dangerous grace, that would coil herself about the heart of God's chosen servant and strangle him—alas! alas!' cries Vigilas with a clear call of anguish, 'What have I done, O God?'

"'Murder, thou red thief!' says Peridore deeply, and drove at him with the pick.

"As he struck, having a sudden compunction, he turned the haft in his hand, so hit old Vigilas with the flat of the pick. Even so, notwithstanding, he knocked him senseless, that he lay without stir, huddled up in the pit he had been digging for Paravail. Peridore ran over him into the hut and saw his love in a shroud, laid out east and west upon the floor, on her breast a wooden cross, candles burning at her head and feet. He picked her up in his arms as she was, throwing down the candles; he turned out of the hut, leaped over Vigilas (who still lay where he had been felled), and ran like a hunted hare westward over the downs. Fear fixed his eyes, fear drove him so fast that he never once looked behind him to see, as he must have seen, fire catch the hermit's hut of Bleme and writhe towards heaven. Love fleeted beside him, despair drove him forward; but overhead he knew he had fearful company. He heard wings beating, caught hissed words, wicked voices now and again. He stayed not, he turned not his face away from the west, but ran

on and on, many a mile, many a league, over hill, over dale, through marish and standing pool, by the side of woods, deep in bracken and tangle; choosing wherever he could the bosky hollows; keeping his face steady, breathing through his nose; husbanding all the strength he had — and that was much. But the wings above him never ceased their pulsing flight, the voices grew bolder as the darkness gathered.

"He knew they were witches. 'Chase, chase!' says one: another, 'He hath the soulless child!' 'Vigilas, our old enemy, is dead!' screamed the first: 'Peridore too shall die,' the second. Anon a third met them in mid-air, crying, 'Head him off, head him off! He must never find the Holy Mount!' At her the two others mocked as they swept on: 'What if he do then? Paravail is dead. He carries a corpse. We follow to get it.' 'What will you make of her?' 'Candles, candles! Follow.' So then three chased him instead of two, and tried to baffle him with their flaggy wings; and as he flinched, his heart was near breaking, as his back was near. He had no feeling in the arms which bore up Paravail. One was fixed in the breast of his smock, the other wound into the first. He could not drop her if he would, dared not stay for breath lest he should stay altogether; but his forces were at an end: near the edge of Cauntrip Plain he stumbled over a rabbit-bury, dropped, could not get up, lay heaped on Paravail's body like a shot bird. 'They shall rip me to pieces to get her,' was the last thought he had. With shrill screams the witches raced on, for by now it was densely dark. So they out-rode and over-rode

him where he lay in deep sleep, crouched upon the form of Paravail. I know not how far he may have travelled, being little acquainted with his country — many miles from Bleme and his own abiding-place it must have been, near the limits of the plain.

"The sun was high in a dome of clear blue when he awoke and looked about him. He was on the slope of a falling, broken land in a country he had no knowledge of — for your true shepherd never leaves the little plot of earth which rounds his labours, and receives himself at the last. Below him, and below a gentle woodland lay a fertile, laughing country of hill and dale; no great way off a walled city, with many churches in it, and one, notably, larger than all, overbearing huge and grey, with a spire whose topmost cross seemed to be drowsing in the sky, alone above our familiar air. This was that very city of Rewish which had beatified Vigilas in his life-time, though Peridore did not know it. South and west of it were the woods, lapping like a tide against the skirts of the plain; and beyond this green ocean he saw the blue peaks and great misty shoulders of mountains. There, in that far dim glory, should be the Holy Mount which the witches had told each other he must never reach. He understood their fear, for he knew — as all his country did by name — the Holy Mount, abode of hermits, sanctuary, assurance of Heaven's promised bliss, shrine indeed of that miraculous Spear with which Longinus pierced our Saviour's side. Pilgrims (in clouds or trailing files) struggled across Cauntrip to win that sacred place, and in time came back

to the villages of the east with the balm of its unearthly peace upon their mild faces. If he could find his way through the guardian woods and scale the splintry rocks (Paravail yet incorrupt in his arms), he did believe he should have her back in life: so and not otherwise. Thus reasoned young Peridore and said his prayers: afterwards he dared to look at Paravail as she lay covered on his knees, to open the sheet and see her face.

"Although he had seen in the course of his short life dead man, dead girl, dead child — for in his day, as in our own still sorrowful day, life and death were bedfellows — here upon his lap lay a beautiful dead thing so frail that before it his mere breathing seemed to stop, as if he feared that the wind of his nostrils might blow it away like a gossamer wreath. The face of her, the hands, the feet, were colour of grey wax; but her hair (all that he recognized as of her) seemed of deep burning colour, like the embers in the heart of a fire. Her lines were sharp and fine, her nose pinched (but not very much), the chin a bleak little promontory, the eyes closed fast, as if the lids, being heavy, had shut of their own weight; there were rings of a darker hue about them. Her mouth, not quite closed, was still drawn tight, was still ashen with the shock of terror which had killed her. Peridore, who could kiss the holy image in the pax-brede, dared not touch with his mouth this pure, cold, stricken thing. It froze the love out of him, and the pity, and the desire he had had. All that remained in him to her-ward was awe, holy fear — this, and a glowing spot of

indignation, that what was so splendid once — to wit, her mouth like folded rose-leaves — should now be grey dust. After a while this grain of anger grew to flame in him; he found himself possessed by it so greatly that he feared to go mad.

"He saw two wood-doves in a tree below him. One sat in the nest, the other bowed on the branch, singing beside her. Peridore put down Paravail in the fern, and with a stone killed one of the birds. He cut the breast open and touched Paravail's lips with the blood, not able to bear the dead hue of them. Deep crimson they showed, and wet. He touched her cheeks with the same hot liquor, anointed her hands and hair. A drop or two of this blood went into her mouth at the corner; and she sighed, and opened her loaded eyes, and looked at Peridore.

"Not surprise, not joy, not thanksgiving filled him now, but despair more black than at first. She lived. Slowly and timidly came back her breath, slowly the tide of colour turned, as the grey was quickened by the sanguine. But those eyes wherewith she looked at him so awfully were now dead, whereas the body lived — vacant, unmindful, void of understanding, like streamless water in a field of snow. She looked and knew him not, looked and saw nothing, looked and received no signal for her blood. What the witches had said of her once falsely, now was true. Here was an empty shell, here a tabernacle without a sojourner, a shrine here without a god. If she lived, it was not for him; if he loved, it was not this shed garment of a girl: now his girl was dead indeed. He

showed to God in the sky his pinched, miserable face, he stretched towards Him clenched and desperate fists. 'O thou King of Taunts, now Thou hast excelled Thyself!' cried he blasphemously to God. It seemed to him then as though a light flaw of cloud swept over and put out the sun, that the land grew dreary, the wind chill. Paravail whimpered a little, stirred in his arms, turned her head about, but ever towards him, nozzling in his smock. The thought like a gush of blood leaped up from his heart to choke him. 'Here I hold in arms a new-born child! But one month suckled on the breast of my mother! O miracle of grace vouchsafed! I will arise and go to the Holy Mount, that she may be nourished.' Tears of joy streamed down his cheeks, down his smock, to Paravail on his lap. He took her up in his arms and went down with her into the great woods.

"Long time, time without reckoning, he battled there, growing old with resource, having for his only guide the chance gleams of the sun, meeting no one, living as he could on herbs and roots, and what wild animals he had the wit to kill. At first and for the most part Paravail slept, and he must carry her; when she awoke it was for hunger's sake, which he (poor wretch!) must satisfy as best he might. No questing parent-bird hunted harder than he. Afterwards she seemed to grow stronger and, led by him, able to walk a little. This she did most patiently, through thicket, holt and morass, beautiful wanderer, nothing saying, nothing seeing, heedless, inconscient, extraordinarily meek, without mind or motion of the affections, without

memory or look forward. He was apt to despair of her chiefly on this account, that she never fashioned words to meet her needs: hungry, she whimpered; filled, she slept; fondled, she laughed or crooned softly as children use; kissed, she kissed not again, but half opened her mouth at the touch of his; and as he kissed her, her soft, soulless eyes pored upon his face, wondering to see that so near and its act so foolish. So he grew ashamed, and kissed her not at all unless she slept. She ate whatsoever he would give her, slept a great deal, sometimes (but seldom) moaned in her sleep, breathed very short, seemed easiest when he had her in his arms, or by the hand. For his own sanity's sake, he found that he must talk to her, even though she neither answered or seemed to hear him. Child as she had become, so he learned to treat her, and so he loved her now — as you love a young child, without a whisper of desire to sully the pure pitifulness of your love. One hope remained and one stay: let him get her to the Holy Mount and all must be well. Do him the justice to believe, if you can, that he had no thought of his own gain in this. No: for the sake of that Paravail, whom once he had loved, he left his father's house; how, clean of all mannish thought, for the sake of this witless Paravail he gave up hope itself, and took arms against the world as for a babe of his own adoption. He fathered, you may say, her by whom he had once hoped to be a father: the mother of his children was now his child. Thus Peridore endured with clean striving, and with honour stripped himself of all but honour. So at last, in a little heathy

place, he saw the peaks of mountains very near; he saw the chapels gleaming white, thin trees that brushed the blue, a temple in a grove, the Holy Mount. Blessing God for the prize of his endeavour set fair before him, he took Paravail by her patient hand, and struck into the last thickets of the forest.

"Now as he walked, filled with high hope, the forest melted away into aisles and clusters of woodland, open stretches of brake and heath, sparse trees, grassy places where water was. Here a cool breeze blew all day long, the air seemed surcharged with the wealth of unaccustomed light. A new world opened, and a strange, favoured country-side. Flowers were at his feet of sorts unknown before; the builder's stuff, the builder's art was new. He passed a little town of white houses, tilled fields about it; he saw children at play, a white church with a tower apart, which canted a little to one side. All this was set in a mist of trees which bore dropping purple flowers. Here he begged some bread and milk for Paravail, and rested an hour or so on the steps of the church.

"Just beyond this place a road ran sharply up between chalk banks, with greensward on either side dotted with juniper and yew. Little shrines were set at every half-mile — Christ on the Cross, the Mother and the Child, Longinus holding up the Spear, Ursula mothering a legion, Christopher who bore the World over the flood, the Magdalene clothed in her hair. The road grew more broken as it rose; out of the turf jutted boulders of rock. At last he climbed upon the bare rock itself, and

only found verdure and flowers in patches, trees that grew rarely, as by grace of the stone. Ever higher and higher before him rose the Holy Mount; but the shrines ceased not to mark his way; and now as he climbed in keener air he could see the dappled country below him — the white hamlet, a river not found before, the dreaming woods, then (like a violet sea) the great plain where his home had been. Thither he looked not long, neither heard any cry in his own heart for those familiar places; but turned his face ardently above him to watch the thin waving trees which stand about the Temple of the Spear, the hope and promise of the broad eaves, of the brave sunshine, of the solitude.

"Now he has mounted the last ridge, the last shoulder, leading Paravail; and now he stands looking into the temple. Flowers grow about his torn feet, wide open to the sun; the humming of bees fills the air; he smells the thyme. Within the deep recesses of the court youths in white robes move quietly to and fro upon the sacred business of the place. Paravail begins to tremble. Feeling her agitation, Peridore's knees knock together. All is very still. Yet he dares to go in.

"He follows the sound of water splashing on bricks; he goes into the court; Paravail follows as she is led. Far within the court he sees the image of our Lady seated, the Child in her lap; and here he stands irresolute, afraid to go further. A youth in a white tunic, barefooted, comes out from behind a green curtain, stands looking gravely at the new comers. Peridore holds out his hand, palm upwards. 'I claim succour of

this holy place,' says he. 'For whom?' the youth asks him. 'For this child, who was dead,' says Peridore, 'and now is new born.'

"The youth replies, 'Give her to me.' 'Not so,' says Peridore; 'you can do no more than I, nor yet so much.' Then says the youth, 'Stay here, then, till I come back.' He goes away. Peridore sits at the foot of the image with Paravail beside him. He hears the pigeons murmuring on the roof, the light falling of water, no other sounds. He says his prayers.

"The youth came back after a while, saying to Peridore, 'You shall follow me with the child.' So Peridore got up and followed him through many corridors until he was brought between curtains into a long, dim, fragrant room, whose ceiling was coffered with cedar-wood and at one end a recess curtained white, with a bed in it; and sitting on the bed a young woman, dark-haired and full in the eye, in a white gown which was held loosely about her person by a red girdle. Peridore knelt down, and guided by his hand Paravail followed him. Then the youth said, who had brought them in, 'Here is the succour you need.' 'I am sure of it,' says Peridore; and the young woman, 'Give her to me.' Peridore led Paravail forward; and as he came on he saw the young woman unfasten the girdle that confined her gown, and shake her head so that all her hair fell loose about her shoulders and neck. Then Paravail was brought to her and at her hands received. Peridore, his charge given over, stood at one end of the bed, the youth at the other.

"The young woman clasped Paravail about the

body and held her very close to herself, looking up into her face. This she did for some little time, and slowly Peridore saw a change come over the girl. Paravail, who had been dead white ever since she had awoken on the hill-side, now flooded with colour. She shut her eyes, swayed about, seemed as if she must fall. But the young woman held her close. Slowly then her knees faltered; and as she sank the woman opened her own knees and received Paravail upon them, still holding her in arms. Paravail fell gently into her lap, and lay there unconscious, with shut eyes and open lips, breathing very fast. Then the young woman laid the girl's cheek against her bosom, and opening her gown bared her breast. And as she put the nipple between Paravail's lips she whispered low in her ear, urgent, secret words which Peridore could not hear; and Paravail, after one or two shakings of the head, one or two struggles, one or two jerks of the body, lay quite still, with shut eyes and slow-moving hands, drinking deeply at the fount of our life. The only sound Peridore heard, above and besides that of Paravail drinking, was the knocking of his own thankful heart. 'Are you content?' asked him the youth who had guided him, in a low voice. Peridore bowed his head. Then that youth took him away.

"Afterwards he understood, without learning, the meaning of these things, but not until the full time of Paravail's suckling had been accomplished. One month she had drunk of Ankeret Foliot; five full months more she must needs be nourished here, for shorter time than this will not suffice to woo a human soul into a child's body. That is

the old rule, wonderfully signified in the case of this Paravail. During such time, while he saw nothing of her, I know that he too renewed himself, suffering without being conscious of it, a silent change. For as he had got fortitude before by the driving of youthful passion, so now he won an equal mind, right judgment, cool blood after heat, fear of God, patience, disposition of the reins, subjection of all members. Winning these he grew from lad to man, and instead of the boyish doting wherewith he had regarded Paravail at first, he had strenuous, long-minded, equable love: in a word, from innocence he had come through scorching to win innocence back.

"At the end of five full months, in the mellow days of harvest, he received Paravail from the hands of the young woman who had fostered her; and whether by reason of his own discipline or of hers — a hard matter to determine — scarcely knew her again. Whereas she had been little, now she seemed tall; whereas she had been knit, now she seemed lax and delicate; whereas the weather had browned her skin, now she was pale as honey. Her eyes were mild and large which had once been bright, piercing and sharp as a mouse's eyes. She spoke gravely, and in a low voice; she kept very still. When he came to her, when she saw him again, they stood shyly apart, as two children who meet for the first time. Then Paravail drew near to Peridore and gave him her cool cheek to kiss; and he remembered how, before, she had been wont to jump at him, and with both arms to cling to his neck, her eager mouth questing for his. Now by his side with bent head she knelt to kiss

the knees of her foster-mother. With him, obedient, modest, pre-sanctified, chaste, she went down the Holy Mount and began the long way to Amberford-Mary across the plain, where his parents lived and he would wed her. No word passed between them of this matter, but either accepted it — she with the dutiful meekness of a wife sobering her heart, and he with the strong assurance of a man nascent in him.

"One last trial remained before these two wayfarers could stay their feet. As God would have it, when they drew near to that city of Rewish which Peridore had seen upon his flight, they entered into the gates of it, meaning to seek lodging for the night, and the consolations of the holy mass before they went further on their journey. Now, as they moved along the street which goes from the West Gate to the Corn Market, behold, two women in red hoods met them, looked intently, turned after, and followed them, talking in whispers, vehemently disputing together. So when our two, being weary with their travel, sat down in the shade on the steps of a church, these other two came by; and one peered into Peridore's face under the brim of his hat. Then she turned to the other who was by, and said, 'This is he. This is the shepherd whom we chased.' And then — 'He hath been to the Holy Mount.' At this they both shuddered and beat their flanks, saying to each other, 'We are undone.' So they sped away together, talking fast. Peridore remembered the night when witches had chased him, but Paravail, as he believed, did not. So he told her nothing about it. They ate their

victuals, and Paravail slept in the shade of the church door. Peridore could not sleep.

"Now, presently there is a great noise afar off, which grows as it comes nearer: a noise of running feet, of a shrill woman crying, 'This way, this way!' confused calling, cries for the Watch. Peridore sits still. He sees the woman in a hood come with a rabble, calling still, 'This way, this way! Take the witch and her leman. Take the burner of Bleme!' She points out Peridore. Then they come and seize him; Paravail also they take and bind her hands behind her. Each is led a different way: he to the common gaol, she to the place of bad women.

"Paravail in the stews, as a flower set in this monstrous bed of weeds, sits apart, slim and tall, while the lost wretches clamour and rail about her. Not a word has she to say to them, for she knows not their language, being new come, as it were, from the knees of her mother. But Peridore eats misery in a solitary cell, and the rats come to eat in his company.

"They bring him up before the Assize, charged with the burning of the hut at Bleme Barrow and attempt to kill and murder the holy tenant thereof with a pick. Peridore denies the first, admits the second. Asked how he justifies so atrocious a deed, he says nothing, because in his heart he has no grudge against Blessed Vigilas and will not condemn the man. He is adjudged to death by hanging. 'Be it so,' says he; 'but I ask one grace of you. Let me see Paravail before I die, yet let her not see me die.' They tell him that she has been denounced for a possessed on the testimony

of two women. 'Foh!' says Peridore, shocked, 'these women are themselves notorious witches, who sat by night obscenely on the roof-tree of old Vigilas, and compassed his destruction, and mine, and Paravail's. And now you permit them to do it!' They say, 'Very well, we will send for Blessed Vigilas, and hear what he hath to say concerning the girl accused.' 'Ah, God of gods, never do that!' cries Peridore, knowing very well what the hermit believed. But they did send for him, to be in Rewish on a certain day, when a fire would be ready for Paravail, and for Peridore a new rope.

"That day came. Paravail, bound, was led out and tied to a stake in the midst of brushwood and kindling-wood; Peridore was roped about the neck, ready to be swung upon a gallows over the fire which should consume Paravail. Thus as they waited for Blessed Vigilas, Peridore ceased not to comfort Paravail with words of great cheerfulness and good hope. Anon there is a shout by the gates, 'Hail the man of God! Ha, Blessed Vigilas!' and Vigilas came striding through the press of people with cavernous eyes glowing like coals, and a fearful white face wherethrough the bones showed purplish. He went directly to the fire where Paravail was bound, and pointed to it with his shaking hand. 'Loose me that maid,' said he, as hoarse as an old sheep. It was done. Then, pointing in like manner to Peridore, he saith again, 'Loose me him;' and he was obeyed.

"Then Blessed Vigilas turned to the people and said, 'Vain glory hath nearly consumed me: there is little left for the rope and the fire. But

because I devised the murder of this innocent I am worthy of the rope; and because the devil in me caused me to see a devil in her, he must be scorched in the fire. And because my old enemy the devil thinketh to have me in Hell at his pleasure, he shall have me there against his pleasure. Assuredly I will go to Hell. I will go down to him to his familiar camping-ground and give him battle. Fifty year five have I contended with him, and mostly beaten him, as you, men of Rewish, can testify. Now let God testify (since you shall never see it) that I go to Hell willingly, to do His work there, when I contend with Legion in the sulphurous field *in sæcula sæculorum.* For in Hell also should God Almighty be served, and I will do it.'

"He turned to Paravail and said, 'Child, Paravail, I have wronged thee from the very beginning, but this youth hath loved thee well from the beginning. His simplicity is better than my cunning. Go thou to him, and love and obey him; for he hath won thee *par avail!*' He gave her hand into Peridore's, saying, 'Boy in years, that through bloody sweat art grown a man, I have wronged thee grievously; but thou shalt think no harm of me now. For, through our stripes we are healed—as thou art healed. And I, who have not had (as it seemeth) stripes enough, now I am about to be healed. Take, love, cherish, honour Paravail.'

"When he had joined their two hands and blessed them, he said, 'Now put that rope about my proud neck.' They did it, and he walked into the midst of the brushwood. 'Now,' said

he, 'put fire about my wicked body;' and he was obeyed. And when the fire had got good hold, as he judged by the crackling and leaping thereof, he said, 'Hoist me up by the rope, good people; but not so far that the fire cannot catch me.' As they hoisted him up he cried out in a loud voice, 'Have at thee, Legion, for a last time!' And so died Blessed Vigilas.

"At this time, as the report comes to me from ancient men, eye-witnesses of these things, a shower of rose leaves fell out of the clear sky and lay all over Paravail, on her hair and shoulders, on her bosom and arms, and over the folds of her gown. Some dropped from her upon Peridore, and one (they say) near to old Vigilas in his fire. But this is not quite certain, because the smoke was very thick about him. And they add, that after Blessed Vigilas had tumbled from the burnt rope into the fire, a large white bird, having the feet of a swan, the body and wings of an albatross, and the neck and head of a phœnix (that Asian bird), flew up from the ashes of the fire and hung with stretched-out wings over the city of Rewish; then sailed slowly away down the wind (which came from the east) until it could be seen no more. And that night forty evil-livers in Rewish were brought to a lively sense of their sin.

"The tale saith no more. But I say this very sincerely, That if the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, the love of Him is the end of it; to which we must all attain if we would walk as reasonable, hopeful men — but hardly, until by patience and tribulation we have sounded the deeps of that our early fear, and learned that in a

single heart only there is no room for that and Divine love. So therefore Christ teach us to learn. Amen!"

Dan Costard with much solemnity ended a discourse, to which Captain Brazenhead felt that he had really very little to add. He thought fit, however, to give the assurance of a man of bloody conversation — "forced upon me," as he said, "by the necessities of this world, and in all hope that in the next I may have space for amendment" — that he approved every word uttered by the good priest, and that he could very well picture the notable strife which must have ensued if Blessed Vigilas, as good as his word, had met old Blackbeard face to face in the fields of Dis. "With a good blade (said he), of Ferrarese make, for choice, waggling in his right hand, his cloak over his left arm for a guard, there should certainly be (as we say) the devil to pay." The Prioress said nothing; the Scrivener implied that the tale reminded him of one very similar, but much more striking, which he had heard in his extreme youth. Mawdleyn and Percival paced their horses soberly side by side, it being unobserved (as they were unobservant) that their two hands had not yet separated. It is not quite certain that the Prioress was hard of sight; but there is no doubt at all that she left the young couple alone.

So, riding comfortably among leafy lanes, they came by the end of the day to the thick woods about Crooksbury, and found harbourage in the meadows ringed with trees by the side of a little river. For that is where Waverley had, and still has, its pleasant seat.

CAPTAIN SALOMON BRAZENHEAD'S TALE

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When the company had betaken themselves to the shady roads which lead out of Waverley, had wound about Crooksbury and about, and were in the lane which turns in and out of tillage to reach Saint Catherine's Chapel, the Prioress of Ambresbury turned to Captain Brazenhead who rode near by, and said, 'Mindful of our conversation this morning, sir, I call upon you to tell us a tale. I hope it may occur to you to make a text of that discourse."

"It had already occurred to me, madam," replied the Captain, seldom at a loss where women were concerned; "It occurred to me the moment our talk was interrupted. From the stores of my experience I shall draw forth a tragic dish for your digestion. And I hope," he added in a louder tone, "I hope, nephew Piers, you will give heed to what I am about to relate."

"I shall obey you, sir," said Percival, "so far as duty to my mistress allow."

"A good lad spoke there, my lady," said the Captain, "unless I am very much mistaken."

"Do you intend to tell us a tale, sir?" the Scrivener asked, edging up his animal.

"There is some thought of it, sir," replied Captain Brazenhead; "Why do you ask?" The Scrivener wetted his lips.

"I have just remembered a little story more remarkable than any we have had yet, and much more remarkable than any we are like to have," he said. "I suppose it will be agreeable to this company that I should relate such a tale as that."

"It will be very disagreeable to me, sir," said the Captain, "and there you have the bitter truth."

"I call on old Brazenface," cries Smith the shipman, and for once the Captain was glad of him. The Prioress agreed.

"We will certainly hear Captain Brazenhead," she decided. The Captain pulled his moustache towards his eye. In due time a bee settled on it.

Here follows Captain Brazenhead's tale, which he called

The Half-Brothers*

"By Cock and his Father," said he, with emphasis, "but I will tell you a tale which I had out of Italy when I served there under Sir John, him (that is) of steel and whipcord whom the Italians called John Aguto, meaning (I doubt not) sharp as a hawk; which he was by name and nature, I assure you."

"If you served Sir John Hawkwood, sir," said the Scrivener, "then are your years at this day one hundred and twenty-three."

"Let my years be what they will," replied the Captain, "my saying is what it is. My tale will cause you to weep; and why not? since weeping is the fashion, and a known old purge of black and other kinds of bile. But because my own humour is so, you shall laugh, I warrant you, between the showers."

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"Oh, cut short, cut short, for your common credit's sake!" cried out Master Richard Smith. "Will you turn hedge-priest at your time of life? Body of me, I had reached 'Love me for ever' by this time."

"Listen nevertheless to me," pursued Salomon Brazenhead. "When I first went into Italy there was living and ruling Castelfranco in the Venetian March a stone-faced old smiter whose name was Tuzio Costanza; black as a black stallion and headed like a Roman soldier was he. He was a faithful servant of the Republic of Venice, by whom indeed he ruled his domains in peace; and father also of two sons, one lawfully begotten of the body of his good lady, and one got waywardly, as we say, without leave or licence of the Church. But just as if, for once, Nature was on the side of Religion, it was so, that the lawful son, who was called Matteo, showed himself whole Costanza, and bore his title-deeds upon his person, being swarthy, black and bold-looking, a heavy-browed, sullen boy, terrible to fight; and that the love-child, Luca (so they named him), favoured the angels, as being golden-haired, soft in the skin, red and white like a miss of fourteen. Year for year, so they stood when I saw them first: sixteen years old apiece, as loving as the Blessed Gemini who cuddle each other all day long on the holy Zodiac, and all night are at the same loving play, if the astrologers are to be believed.

"At this time Master Tuzio lost his very excellent lady, a woman whom he had in such order that she had mothered the motherless Luca as if he had been very twin with her Matteo;

he lost her, I say, of a summer colic which sent her post-haste to the churchyard; and he, making the best of it, and disposed to use the rest of his life in comfort and honour, conceived his first business to be the settlement of his two lads, whose legs were too long and their appetites for one thing or another too keen for the little fee of Castelfranco to nourish. What must he do incontinent, but send them East and West? Luca, the pretty boy, had a ticklish palm and a tongue as smooth as melting butter. 'Off with you, chicken,' says his father, 'to Venice and the Prior of Saint Gregory. We will have you in a frock; for those qualities of yours command their price within the true fold all the world over.' But Matteo, bone of his bone, heir of his name, his counterpart in face, shape, and temper, he sends into Lombardy, to learn fighting from an ancient foe of his, and very good friend at the same time; I mean old Pierfrancesco Visdomini, Lord of Peschiera, standard-bearer to Messer Bernabò the tyrant of Milan.

"'Go, Matt,' says this stout old father, 'go you, my son, and learn of my friend Pierfrancesco how best you may cut his throat in after years.' And off went Matteo in great fettle, having first kissed on both cheeks and on soft red mouth his half-brother Luca, the future Archbishop. Of Luca, I say little here; but of Matteo I tell you most plainly, that black-avised young scowler had a heart like hidden fire, and when he loved, loved altogether with a consuming rage. Do you know that sacred saying concerning the devils, which reads backwards as well as forwards, and so pro-

claims its dreadful power: *In Girum Imus Noctu Non Ut Consumimur Igni?* Now, so it was with Matteo Costanza: he went in chains, lest (loosing himself to love) he should be devoured in his own flame.

"He took the road to Peschiera, a place which lies on a tongue of yellow sand upon the dark blue waters of Garda; and by means of letters of his father's was nobly received by Master Pierfrancesco, and hospitably entertained for two or three years. He learned of his teacher various noble old virtues now outmoded and unsung, to wit, sobriety, measure, reticence, and a power of hitting so terrible that you are very wary of hitting at all. He learned to prick with the spear by being well pricked himself, to hew with broad sword and stab with dagger by the same good precept. He could use a bow, an arbalest, a pike; he grew to be part of his horse, and to make his followers parts of him. Oh, trust me, Sir John Hawkwood would never have said of him, 'Here is a son of my old age!' if these things had not been as I tell you.

"All this he took of Pierfrancesco Visdomini, standard-bearer to Bernabò of Milan; but he took more — alack! here comes my tale to a fester-point, that he took much more than this. Pierfrancesco, you must know, had a son and a daughter; the son, Pierluigi, serving with the Florentines, a wolfish young man, mostly hungry like his father; the daughter, Madonna Emilia, in those days at home, a pale, thinnish, smiling girl, very tender and shrinking and anxious to please you; a moonfaced, sidling, cuddling,

snoozling, snuggling, coaxing, adoring, mothering, greensick little slip of delicacy, fifteen years old and no more, by Cock and the Prophet Jonah.

"Young Matteo, exercising his strong body with the pricking of lances and what-not, grew mannish, and cast about him mannish looks at maids and such like cates. Young Emilia thought him a dog, but ended (as is the way of her kind) by reversing the letters and finding him a god. Body and soul, she was then his to dispose. She fed upon him, prayed to him, lay at his feet in the wet grass. Did he lift a finger she came trembling up; did he lift an eyebrow she thought her last hour was come, and that she deserved it richly. Was he kind, she panted; was he cold, she shivered as one naked in the wind. In a word, she adored mankind in him because he was the only man she had ever seen; and he, red-hot lover as he was, shook off his chains and ate her up."

"Out upon you, sir," said Sister Guiscarda, a severe virgin of mature age, "Out upon you, sir; you talk as if we were all for the same meal!"

"By my strong soul, you wrong me, Sister," cried Captain Brazenhead, "I have no ill meaning here. Matteo Costanza was a youth of eighteen years old, the soul of honour. I speak of her spiritual part, which is all that he ever ate, poor young man. He was no ruffian. Far from that, he thought of her as of the Mother of God. But I proceed, by your leave. These pretty two exchanged vows, kisses, clingings, fierce gropings of heart. He swore her his upon the Cross and Christ, upon the Sorrowful and Joyful Mysteries,

upon Heaven and Hell, and Death and Judgment. I believe upon my immortal hope that there never was a couple more gloriously unhappy since lovers first found delight in tearing each other by the heart-strings. One year it took him to see her lovely, one year to make her the most wretched girl in the world; in the middle of the third year Bernabò of Milan bought up my master Sir John for a bout with Venice, and me (as the fact was) in his pocket. 'Go, Matteo,' said Pierfrancesco Visdomini; 'my master Lord Bernabò makes war upon Venice in fifteen days. This night I kiss you; but to-morrow I shall spit in your face. This night you are my dear good boy, son of my old friend Tuzio; but to-morrow I shall see in you a black imp of that old rascal Costanza, my abhorred enemy. Go now. Pack your saddle and away.' There was no other road for Matteo but that of Venice. Much as he loved his Emilia, he had no thought then to sell his country, his father and his patrimony. There followed, by Cock, the most sorrowful leave-taking of lad and lass you ever saw in all your days. What a straining of young breasts, what a kissing, what a searching of hot eyes, what sobbing, what horrible silences were there! Blood fills these hardy eyes of mine at the thought. As for you, ladies, what are your little hearts doing at this moment? Jumping like frogs in the wet, I'll go bail! They may well jump, for this was a desperate young business, I give you my word. He swore her true as steel; he frightened her sorely; he cursed and kissed, he strained and forced away. Back she came creeping, holding out her hands, and her

face put meek and sideways: so all's to do again. Go he must and did. He saw his Emilia stand on the tower's top, waving him farewell by the light of the moon. She fluttered thin and white, like a little flag. He shook his sword in her direction, threat or greeting, half one and half t'other. So he went to the wars, and his most unhappy star was kindled.

"He proved a fighter of the best. Sir John took the Milanese afield against Venice and Mantua, and met their hosts in the plain of Legnago; but whether it was the ground, or the silly cattle he had to lead, or (as the plain truth was) that my stomach had turned sour overnight and caused me to see monsters where were only light-armed horsemen of Treviso and the parts adjacent — the fact is as clear as *In Principio erat verbum*, that the Milanese were routed and broken up, and that you might see young Matteo Costanza ranging the field like a colt in a green paddock. I gauge the feelings of a father by a nose I have for such sweet motions; so I gauge old Tuzio's feelings to see so hopeful a slip of his grafting. And I am glad that he had them, friends all, for (if you will believe me) they were his last. Yes, yes, his horse stumbled in the last charge home; and it was his own troop rode over him, and frittered up his ribs and his midriff. Matteo found himself orphaned by his honest feudatories, and himself their mesne lord at the same stroke. They tell me he sat afield, smoking hot from his late exploits, and on his knees held what remained of his old father. From his man's work he came back to boy's work; he snivelled and looked

pinched. What! But I honour him for it. They were good tears, holy tears: a many such have I shed. By the Mass, I could weep now!

"They laid the pashed old fighting hound on a tressle-bier and let Matteo take him home to Castelfranco. It behoved the Republic, d'ye see, to put in Matteo as soon as might be, lest mischief should come of it. Nobody who knew my master, Sir John, would suppose him slow to the advantage of an empty castle and town on the March. Off went Matteo with his men and dead father in the dark; and hard by Este, in the passes of the hills he was ambushed and set upon by a party of knights of the road, *routiers*, free gentlemen — any name you please for cut-throats; so in the black belly of the night there was horrible silent carnage, men grunting, men squealing, as they smote or were smitten, and never a blink of starshine to lead the sword. Matteo fought like one possessed of devils, and, breaking his sword by misadventure, put his dagger between his teeth and went about with his hands at work, feeling for throats. He got a hold, closed and fell with his quarry. They rolled scuffling and biting in the dark, but Matteo had ten strengths in him, what with his old father and new lordship; he got his dagger out and in, in and out again; a man's life and a man's dying curse into the bargain.

"'The blight of God fall on and wither you,' said he who lay jetting blood.

"'It was fair fighting,' says surly Matteo; and the other,

"'You shall remember my curse.'

"'What name have you, friend?' says Matteo again.

"He said, 'Pierluigi Visdomini of Peschiera,' and gaped, and so died. Matteo knew very well what he had done, to wit, slain the son of his old master, the brother of his love.

"It turned the world dun-colour for him. Dreadfully as he stalked about it afterwards, he was most dreadful in Castelfranco, as they report — and reasonably, for that Castelfranco is not so big as the world, and a sulky fellow in the larger room might be a Minotaur shut up in that little walled town. Certain it is that his mortification had one issue. He took the field again, and did so terribly that all Italy knew his name in a year. The Meagre Wolf they called him — Il Lupo Magro — and far and wide citizens of walled cities trembled at the words. At the siege of Padua he broke his arm under the ruin of a bridge, and so missed the sack of the town which followed hard upon his misfortune. But the Paduans very well knew who their conqueror was, and brought him the keys of their citadel as he lay sick at a convent. And who do you suppose came to him kneeling with those who bore the keys? Who else but his half-brother, snug Master Luca, with his face of a holy burning Seraphim and his sleek limbs of a girl? That was the young man, ladies and good sirs, upon the word of an untirable soldier.

"This Luca Costanza was by now the prettiest soft rogue of a friar you ever saw; to the beguiling eye was superadded the silky tongue. Three years had wrought their magic upon him. I tell

you, he were a bold man who would set wife or daughter on the further side of the grille over against him. Parts he had for the trade: he could sing, he could make canzonetas in the fashion of Lombardy and of Languedoc; his was the supple brain, and his the calculating head-piece, all encased in peach-bloom and gold. Now, when he saw his grim brother Matteo, this chamberer became dewy with tears (which meant very little to him); but when Matteo saw him he sobbed in his throat, boy once more, and 'Oh, come, oh, come, my brother!' says he; and had him in his arms in a trice. Before you could count twice five, there was Luca sitting on the bed, listening to Matteo's words pouring out of him like a flooded mill-dam. What did he hear? Do you ask that, my masters? Turn to the beauteous ladies by side of you: they will let you know. He spoke Emilia, Emilia, Emilia, and again Emilia, Emilia Visdomini. There was no other woman in the world for him; so Luca, for whom the world held many women, was given to understand. Then the grief was revealed, since grief there was. Emilia could never be his. 'God of Love, why not then?' cries Luca in amaze.

"'I have slain her brother in the dark,' says Matteo, hollow-voiced, 'and he called down upon me the blight of God.'

"'Is that all?' says Luca; and Matteo,

"'What more would you have?'

"Luca put a warm hand on his brother's shoulder. 'For much less than that,' says he, 'have maidens been unmaidened.'

"'How now?' says Matteo.

"'Why, thus,' his brother replied. 'The old Visdomini will take it amiss, I suppose?'

"'Alack!' says Matteo.

"'By no means,' quoth Luca. 'You offer Castelfranco and your hand for the girl. He cries for a sword and shuts her in her chamber. What shall she feed on in there, do you think, if not your image? She will grow fat on that. So women nourish their hearts. And so fathers drive their girls into their enemies' arms. Leave it all to me, Matt,' says this Luca. Matteo kissed him.

"Thus it was accorded between them, that Luca should go to ask the hand of Miss for his brother Matthæus, Dominus de Castelfranco. And he was to tell the whole truth.—How the said Matthæus by misadventure had killed Pierluigi Visdomini in dark battle, midnight battle, having been attacked by the dead man as he was bearing his own father's body to the burying. This notwithstanding, the said Matthæus did earnestly pretend for the hand of Donna Emilia, and without a dower. The Visdomini were bare to the bones of money and lands; the dowry-quittance should tempt them, Luca judged: not so Matteo. But Matteo, in truth, did so urgently long for sight or touch of his little Emilia that he sent his brother against his own hopes—that thus, at second-hand, he himself might seem to deal with her. 'Take her, dear Luca, this ring,' said the honest lover, 'and give her one message from me; one and no more.'

"'And what is your message, brother?' says Luca the debonair.

"'Tell her the ring is from the True to the

Most True,' says Matteo; and Luca puts his tongue into his cheek.

"Off he set, howsoever, flushed with safe-conducts and other letters commendatory from the Venetian power. Arrived at Peschiera, he found old Pierfrancesco, he found his bony wife; but he found no fresh Emilia at all. She was not there; he learned from the women that she had taken service with Madonna Buonconforta, wife to Bernabò of Milan. 'Soho!' says this Luca to himself, 'Milan will suit me very well. It is a great city, and Messer Bernabò a munificent master for a baseborn lad of parts. I will go to Milan.' But first he boards Master Pierfrancesco with his tidings of death in battle and offers of marriage without a dowry. Pierfrancesco listens to what he has to say, and listens to the end; then he ups and shows Luca a long sword. 'Do you see this, Master Friar?' he says. 'Certainly I do,' says Luca.

"'I would spit their two hearts on this blade,' says the old man, biting his words, 'and see them roast at my kitchen fires, before I allowed a Visdomini to meet a Costanza unarmed. Now, go to your master the devil.' What about this, sirs and noble ladies? Did he give the forward cut? There is none more forward, by Cock. Where goes our Luca but to Milan with all his letters commendatory in his vest? There he wormed his way in, there he saw, and there had speech with the young Emilia, grown to be a beauty of so willowy, so slow-smiling, so enslaving a kind that, if he played a villainy upon his brother, I know not who is to be blamed. As

to that, wait for a little. He had his own game to play first, and very well he played it. I knew Messer Bernabò Visconti well enough, a puissant and glittering lord, who thought like lightning and burned up all Lombardy before he had done with it. He was born a soldier and lived a tyrant, and died a victim to his own pleasures. Very passably indeed he liked handsome youths and handsome women. So he fancied Donna Emilia, stroked her, called her his Madonnetta; and so he fancied the beauteous Luca Costanza and made him prime favourite in the great Court of Milan — the greatest Court, but one, these experienced eyes of mine have ever looked upon, and contemned. In a few months Luca Costanza had Milan under his thumb; and then, waxing fat, as the way is, he began to kick, having scriptural precedent, I believe. In this wanton humour he looked upon Emilia with favour, with a half-shut eye (as it were); and she looked upon him as on one with whom she must reckon if she was to better herself in the Court. Presently, after a little, Luca gets her alone, whips out the ring he had in charge, and — 'Yours, Madonna,' he says. 'Why,' says she, 'who gives me a ring?'

"'One who calls himself The True,' says Luca, with a half sigh.

"She blushed to hear him, thinking he so styled himself; and then says she, 'But what has The True to say to me?'

"'Oh, pretty rogue,' says Luca to himself, 'mighty little, I fancy.' But aloud he said, 'The True sends the ring to The Most True,' and watched her like a cat. She went all white to the

lips, and her eyes darted at him, and about him, and away. 'Matteo sent it,' she says in a whisper. 'That is his name,' says Luca. 'And what is Matteo to you, good Friar?' she asks him. 'Oh, an acquaintance of mine of old standing,' says Master Luca. 'He slew unwittingly your brother Pierluigi, and your father says that both you and he shall die before you meet each other again. But, notwithstanding, Matteo sends you this ring.' And then he set a watch upon her, and saw her shiver and shake, and wring her pretty hands.

"By this conduct she betrayed him her mind. Not Matteo she loved, but a dim figure of Matteo four years dead. Not Matteo she loved; but she feared him. The very first thing she said, with great haunted eyes and mouth woe-begone, was this — 'Will he come to fetch me, do you think?' 'Like enough,' says Luca, shortly, and she began to cry and rock herself about. I assure you a handsome girl looks well in this situation. Grief relaxes her, she is melting, ready for the moulding hand; but you know that as well as I do. I cannot blame Luca for doing as he did; it were monstrous that women should weep and not be comforted; and how comfort her against what she fears but by telling her to have no fear, for that which she fears will not come to pass? So Luca did; and every day she sought him out with fears, and every day he showed her how no fear should be. Or if she went not to him he must needs go to her, and whether she feared or not, beseech her not to fear. They used to meet in a little church I know very well; Sant' Onofrio it is called. There in the dusk those two comforted each other, and there

or elsewhere Luca betrayed his brother and gave Emilia a living image instead of a dead one to enshrine in her heart. All this was a matter of six months, which time had sufficed Matteo Costanza to take the field again, and drive the Milanese out of the Venetian March.

"As an end of such exploits on his part, my master Sir John Hawkwood came home to Milan and saw the Lord Bernabò every day. 'My lord,' said he, 'you shall not blame me that affairs have gone counter. I and my company have done our best, but I cannot drive sheep without a dog. Now, your Milanese are sheep, my lord, and the dog is kennelled in Venice; at Castelfranco you shall find him.'

"I will buy this Venetian dog for you, John,' says Bernabò, 'if you will fetch him home.'

"'That I can do, my lord,' says Sir John.

"'As how?' asks Lord Bernabò.

"'Report has it,' said Sir John, my master, 'that the young wolf Costanza has set his heart upon a lamb of your fold. You must throw him a sop if you want him.'

"'Where is the lamb? Where is the sop?' cries Lord Bernabò.

"Sir John told him that Donna Emilia was the price. 'And a good price too,' says Bernabò, who had fancied her himself — in all honour, mind you. However, he agreed with my master, because necessity was outside the door.

"Now, the term of this was set, that Sir John should win over Matteo Costanza by means of Donna Emilia. Well and good. There was a truce of forty days declared, in which time my

master sought out his man and opened the matter. 'By God, I will say nothing to it,' said Matteo. 'I will have her with clean hands,' says he. 'What might that mean?' asked him Sir John. 'Why,' says Matteo, 'I have slain her brother in a fair fight, and I fear that her father may take it amiss. Now I will either have her from him by arms, or from his open hands — one or the other; but not by purchase from that thief of Milan, your master.'

"'Well,' said Sir John, 'if I cannot move you ——'

"'You might as easily move Monte Rosa,' says Matteo Costanza. What! But a fine young man, I call him.

"My master, Sir John, rode away from Castelfranco all in a pother; but he must needs report to my lord Bernabò how he had sped. 'A proud cock indeed!' quoth Bernabò. 'Let me have speech with my friend Visdomini.' Now, old Visdomini, much as he loved his blood, loved his country more. 'Milan has had my life in her hand long enough, and my father's life, and my son's. My lord, you shall have my daughter's since you need it. Give her to young Costanza, if it must be; but let Milan prevail, Amen!' So he said, and Bernabò Visconti departed very well pleased.

"Thus they won over Matteo Costanza to sell his nation and his master for the sake of a girl's meek smile. But there was mighty little smiling in the Church of Sant' Onofrio, I promise you, when Emilia went to be comforted, and Luca Costanza to give comfort.

"By this time Donna Emilia needed more comfort than Luca had to spare, who wanted a deal himself. 'Here is my brother coming for his wife,' thought he, 'to find her as good as wife already, and better than many wives are. Lord my Saviour, what shall I do?' The truth was that Matteo, when he came, must find her the mother of a boy.

"There was no getting out of that; and here you see the pretty quandary in which our Luca saw himself. The girl was his altogether at that season, adoring in him the father of her child. By that only she was strong to face Matteo himself, whose image, much as she feared it by habit, was now grown blurred and faint, washed out (maybe) by Luca's love balsams. So when she heard of what had been devised, how Matteo was to come in and help Milan, how his price was herself, and the seller her father—she laughed comfortably, and put up her face for Luca to kiss it. 'Too late, too late, this poor Matteo!' she said; and 'Too late indeed,' said Luca. But he kissed her face, turning over in his mind how he could get out of the quag in which he was stuck. 'What shall you say to your father, chuck?' asks he; and she says that she will excuse herself from this marriage. 'Never do that, my soul!' cries Master Luca; 'but agree, agree; and leave me to find a way out.' She laughed. 'You little know Matteo Costanza,' she says, 'if you think him satisfied with agreement.' 'Let me deal with him, for all that,' says Luca.

"'No, no, my King-Cupid,' cries she. 'He is

a good knight. I will tell him the truth and ask his pardon. That is the way of honour.'

"'It is the way of death, Emilia,' says Luca, very white.

"'Fear not for me, dear love,' says Emilia.

"'I do not,' says Luca, 'but by my soul, I fear for myself.'

"She looked strangely at him, not perceiving all his drift. 'Heaven and earth!' says she — and no more. Then Luca told her, what she had never known before, that Matteo was his brother of the half-blood; and she reeled where she stood. He went on to use those wits which he had in abundance, and those welling founts of tears. He knelt, he clasped, he humbled himself, dropping tears like thunder showers all the time. He was (said he) a villain, a black thief, a white thief, a Judas, a Pontius Pilate, a miserable, aching, groaning, longing lover. He was a father who could never look his child in the face, he was a lover whose mistress would bid him to death — and God knew, he said, how willingly he would go to death for her sake: but I say that God knew nothing of the sort. In truth, he threw himself so far below her that Emilia, who had a soft heart, was closely touched, and spent herself to raise him up again, if it might be only a part of the way. She could not find it in her heart to condemn a man who had done all these villainies for the sake of her love. A coward she knew him, but he loved her; a coward he was, but she loved him. What she agreed to do was this, in the end. She would confess to Matteo the bitter truth, but would cast no paternity on

Luca. Luca swore her, with a hand on the five crosses on the altar-slab, one touched after another; and had to be content with that. So they waited, miserable sinners that they were, with love turned sour in their mouths; and the child was born before ever Matteo came to Milan.

"He came in his time, and rode in by the Gate of the Sun, like a young Roman Consul come to view his province. Messer Bernabò with his brothers and his base brother met him at the Castle; they made as much of him as he would allow, but this was very little: Matteo had a short way. He signed the treaties, he sold himself with few words spoken; then says he, turning curtly on Messer Bernabò, 'Let me see Pierfrancesco Visdomini and Madonna Emilia.' This was done. When he saw old Pierfrancesco he knelt down on the flags and kissed his foot, the first time in his life he had condescended to any but his Saviour, you may well believe. 'Get up, Costanza,' says Visdomini. 'Not so, sir,' he replies, 'till I have your forgiveness.' Old Visdomini sat down. 'Tell me the truth from the beginning,' he says, 'and I shall believe you.' Kneeling where he was Matteo tells him the tale. At the end Pierfrancesco freely forgives him and bestows, with an open heart, his daughter upon the slayer of his son. 'Now,' says Matteo, leaping to his feet, 'let me have the price of my renunciation.' They take him in to Emilia; and whether she held her mad heart or not, whether her lips were grey, whether there was panic-fear alight in her blank eyes, whether she was cold-

footed, hot-headed, dizzy and sick to death — I leave you to judge.

"'My love, my love, I have come!' he says gulping.

"'Alas,' says she in a whisper.

"'I see my glorious Saint!' he cries.

"She says, 'You see ruin,' and fell to his feet, and held to them fast.

"This he could not allow, so stooped to raise her. Together they tussled on the floor, she to stay where she was, he to lift her up. So as they strove together he felt a new master and she a new, more dreadful fear. Up she got and fled to the wall; he followed after, lowering and angry by now.

"'What does this mean, my love?' says he, panting.

"'O misery, misery, my ruin,' says she. He knew it all by now, and she saw him blind and possessed, fumbling for his dagger. She runs to him with her vest pulled open, her white bosom bare. 'Kill, kill, kill!' she cried, and awaits the red harvest. But Matteo covered his eyes. 'O God, a mother's breast!' he said, and shuddered like a man in a fever. The holiness of her estate saved her for worse things. Matteo was till then an honest man. But here is a sorrowful pass for a young lover, whose only fault was the vehemence of his love.

"Now, this poor Emilia, also, so far as she could be, was an honest woman. When she saw that Matteo meant murder still, though not of her, no fury or grim silence of his could drag out of her the name of her undoer. Her spirit was as great

by now as is that of any mothering thing in the world. Set dogs to worry a lambing ewe, or a littering cat, or a broody bird: the piety of the blessed creature outvails the lust of the foe. So here. Emilia, a double mother, defended her babe, and her babe's father. Matteo left her with these words—'You are mine. I have bought you with the price of treachery. I will never let you go. This is your punishment and mine, that I shall see you every hour of the day and know myself fool and knave, and you shall see me, and read in my face what indeed you are. Stay you here till I come for you.'

"He went out to seek his twittering brother, and when he found him the strong sluices wherewith he had dammed up his sorrow were cast down, and the floods leaped out. Matteo fell weeping upon Luca's neck, and so remained long time. But Luca could have laughed and chirped for thankfulness.

"'Oh, brother,' says Matteo, with terrible sobs which shook him to pieces, 'Oh, brother, could you not have saved her for me?'

"'Alas,' says Master Luca, 'I should have saved her if I could.'

"'I know it well,' says Matteo, 'but not even a brother's love can keep wretched women from folly and sin.'

"'That is so indeed, brother,' says Luca, very demure. Then Matteo's eyes began to burn.

"'I conjure you, Luca, by our father's good name, tell me who was the thief of my honour,' he says; and Luca fenced with him.

"'I know not indeed, I know not indeed,' says he. Matteo looked at him.

"'Where have your eyes been, brother, all this while?' he asks him. Luca began to stammer, confused.

"'I see,' says Matteo, 'that you do know his name, but will not tell it. I think you may have a reason for that. I think so indeed.' It was not that he began to sniff at his brother's real offence; but it was so that Luca thought he had. That gave him a rare fright.

"'Oh, Matteo,' he said quaking, 'this is a wicked Court, where the greatest in authority find the greatest scope for sin.'

"'Proceed,' said Matteo.

"'Alack,' cried Luca, 'must I bear witness against my neighbour?'

"'There is no reason against it,' says Matteo, stern as death. 'The Scripture saith, Thou shalt not bear false witness. Look to it that you do not.'

"'I dare not do it, I dare not speak — I fear the power of Milan!' So said Luca in a sweat of fear. He saw murder in Matteo's bright eyes.

"'Fear nothing, Luca,' says Matteo, with his dagger free, 'fear nothing, Luca, but God and me.' Luca caught his breath. 'So,' says Matteo, 'you will not? Then prepare yourself.' Luca sees the bare knife and shrieks for fear. He falls on his knees — 'Mercy, have mercy, Matteo!' he whines. 'I will tell thee what to do.'

"'Tell, then,' says Matteo.

"'Go, ask in Milan whether the Lord of Milan loved not his wife's maid. Ask what he gave,

and what called her.' Matteo went out to ask. Now, it was true enough, as I have told you, that Messer Bernabò had fancied Donna Emilia; also that he had given her a belt of gold and enamel of Limoges, and called her, because of her meek beauty, La Madonnetta, which means Lady-kin.

"All this Matteo gathered in Milan as easily as boys get nuts in October. He read it ten times worse than it was, because of his own inflammation; he read all the shameful fact into Messer Bernabò's heart which, as you know, lay nearer home. Monstrously he did, like a madman; for by this time he was both mad and a monster. Emilia he took and Emilia's child, and sent them with Luca out of Milan under escort to Castelfranco. He himself, then, with certain hired assassins of his choosing, attacked Messer Bernabò at the coming out of church one morning and stabbed him deep between the shoulders. Three times he stabbed: 'This for Emilia; this for Venice; this for Costanza!' were his words as each time the knife went to work. He just failed of killing his man; but did fail, and so drew down all the enmity of Venice, which might else have pardoned his first treachery for the sake of his second. In the frenzy that followed he hacked a way for himself out of Milan, and gained the open country. They pursued him, but he had their heels and gained his walled town. There he had space to breathe for a little, but not very much.

"I think he knew that his hour was at hand: it had been odd if he did not. All Italy was his enemy, within doors and without. The Milanese

hated him because he had stabbed their tyrant, the Venetians because he had stabbed not deep enough. This brought Venice and Milan together; wise men make profit out of the vagaries of fools. Luca hated him because he feared him, and Emilia hated Luca. Within that strong house of Castelfranco all sat hushed in their hatred and fear of one another under the shadow of Death's wings. They tell me — those who escaped — that from dawn to dusk, day after day, no soul spoke a word to another, though they lived in the common hall and ate at the common table. Whether Matteo had by now suspicion of Luca, I cannot tell you. If he had none, why did he never speak with him? He let none be seen at any rate; but Luca eyed him about wherever he went, dreading a knife in the back; and as for Emilia, she would not suffer either brother near the child. I suppose Matteo must have guessed fire from this kind of smoke.

"Now here I make an end of my tale, and in this manner. The Venetian Admiral led a great force up against Castelfranco and besieged it so close that soon there was nothing to eat. That silent company of wretches, on a day, sat down to their board with never a crumb of food upon it. All the noise in the house was of Emilia's child wailing for milk, which she could not give him, yet dared not ask of Matteo. Nor could she pray him by ancient love that the siege might end; but Heaven's love is more ancient than all, and by Heaven's mercy it did end. Venice and Milan accorded; so in the trenches about the walls stalked Messer Bernabò Visconti and the Duke

of Venice, with my master Sir John for their common friend.

"One night we mined the eastern gate and got in under cover of dark. There was fighting in the streets, one or two houses fired; the fire caught, and ringed the citadel with flame. Soon we got the doors of that stronghold down, and broke through, Messer Bernabò, the Venetian Admiral, Sir John Hawkwood and your servant, with others. By the light of the fires without we saw our man at bay in his hall. He had the tressle-tables thrown up like breast-works, himself behind; and behind him again Emilia white as a ghost, her child in her arms, and Luca the friar, rigid with the sickness of awful fear. We who came in stopped at the barriers to see what were best to do; for we wished no violence to the poor girl, nor had any grudge (so far as we knew) against the friar.

"'Are you come, Lord Bernabò, for your minion?' says Matteo, grim and cold.

"'I am come, master, for you,' says my lord.

"'Me you shall have in good time,' says Matteo again, 'and make your pleasure of my carcase. But if you want her whom you have made shameful, you shall come and fetch her.'

"'I have nothing to do with your wife, fellow,' says my lord.

"'She is not my wife, dog, thanks to you!' Matteo thundered, and turned to the girl. 'Emilia,' says he, 'art thou mine or his? Art thou mine or another's?' Her lips moved, but not her eyes.

"'Thine, O Matteo,' she said in a voice like the wind in dry reeds.

"'Mine to dispose?' says he.

"'Yea,' says she. He laughed aloud — but dreadfully.

"'Thus then I dispose of mine own thing. Look you, Bernabò,' he said, and stabbed her deep in the heart.

"We all fell back at the horrid deed: we who had seen so many, and done them too, by my soul! So then the frantic wretch snatches up the child and takes a step forward.

"'I have used my way with my own,' says he. 'Now, Bernabò, use yours with what is yours' — and he would have thrown the child over the tables to my lord. But Luca Costanza shrieked and made to take it from him, and Messer Bernabò gave a great horse-laugh. Matteo saw the whole truth at last, and turning madly, cut his brother down. Luca fell without a sound and lay still: we leaped the tables. Matteo died fighting like a beast embayed: twenty wounds were found in the front of his body, all of my own counting, and some few of my own dealing, if the truth is to be told in this company.

"So died, good friends, the right line of this honourable fighting house of Costanza, doomed (as it seems) from the beginning. So also died that other house, which loved or hated Costanza as war or peace was abroad. For Costanza had slain both Visdomini's children, and Visdomini's children had cursed Costanza. Here you have a circle of misfortune; and whose the beginning or whose the first fault, let prophets and philosophers determine. This I know, that if the right line of Costanza died out, the left line held on. The

child of Luca Costanza and Emilia Visdomini was put in possession of the fief, and grew to live and flourish and fight battles for Venice. And for all I know against it he lives and fights them to this hour.

"That is the tale," said Captain Brazenhead, "which I singled out in Italy, when I served there under Sir John Hawkwood, that tailor's boy who became a great captain. Go to, I make an end."

"By the Lord, sir," said Master Richard Smith, "I am not sorry for it."

But no one else said anything at all. Musingly, each occupied with his own cares, they climbed the hill into Reigate.

THE PRIORESS OF AMBRESBURY'S TALE

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The departure of Captain Brazenhead — for at Reigate he took up a more desperate enterprise than pilgrimage, and sought rather the crown of a king than that of martyrdom, and Lord Say's head before Saint Thomas's — the Captain's defection, I say, lost Percival his protector and caused Percival to lie.

That is a fair retort to make, that he having lied so much already, another was little odds. Yet the difficulty of lying is, not to lie, but to be believed when you do lie. And how account comfortably for the absence of Captain Brazenhead when that warrior had gone to raise the King's lieges in Kent against the King's peace? Percival, after much distress of mind, considered that to say the Captain had been summoned to London by the King in Council was but to advance the truth a little; for he was pretty sure in his own mind that such would be the fate of his gallant friend and such the fruit of his labour. He did not scruple, therefore, to declare this forecast of his as a fact to the Prioress. Whether she believed it or not he had no means of telling. The Prioress had a baffling trick of gravity about her. Master Smith the shipman believed it, but in too literal a sense. "Justice is tardy in

this world," said he; "but if ever a rope flacked hungry for a rogue, so flacks that rope in the hands of the King and Council for old Brazen-guts."

Percival grew red under the eyes: "You had better repeat that to me when we are alone," he said privily to the mariner; to which Master Smith replied with a meaning smile, that were he alone with *the young man* he should not waste time in that manner. Percival's eyes grew very misty; and Master Smith went on explosively to debate whether a piping voice ever took a youth further than a lady's footstool? or whether, indeed, a youth (properly so called) could have such a voice? "I would see a beard on that chin of thine before I trusted thee for a game-poult," he said; "ah, and thy throstle-note should turn to croaking. My lady of Ambresbury trusts to sleek looks; but I know what I know."

"What do you know, sir?" says Percival furiously. "What the devil do you know?"

"I know my way about Gloucester," replied the Shipman; "and if I saw thee not kirtled and busked in Hare Lane, hemming a shift on the door-step of thy mother's house, mistress, then I have never sailed the Severn River, and never brought a pink up Hempstead Creek. If I am wrong, say so; but I knew again that long nose and button mouth of thine the moment I clapped eyes on thee at Winton."

"I see no reason to deny that I was born in Glo'ster," said Percival, "nor have I ever denied that my father's house was in Hare Lane. But what is this to the purpose?"

"Thus much," replied the Shipman, "that I cannot call to mind any of thy name in the city. Thrustwood is no Glo'ster name to my knowledge. Nor do I understand how one of thy honest fame (as I first knew thee) should go trampling after Holy Thomas in a page's breeches, calling thyself nephew (nephew, ha!) to a wicked old tosspot mercenary."

The conversation, neither encouraged by Percival nor by Smith's wife, stayed here; and the Scrivener broke in by proposing another tale from one of the company, adding that he had just remembered an incident in the life of the great general Agricola, so remarkable that he felt sure of his ground in offering to relate it. But the prerogative of choice lay still with the Prioress, who (saying that she could not select) made Percival her deputy. Percival selected the Prioress, with a discretion to which I cannot think Master Smith had done full justice. She began at once. "If I rightly caught a chance inquiry of this honest man's," she said, half turning to the shipman, "he asked, Whether a young lad's voice ever took him far?"

"I did that, please your ladyship," said Smith; "but I meant to hit another mark altogether — doubting the lad more than the voice."

"This assures me," continued the Prioress, "that his knowledge of spiritual matters is not on a level with his seamanship, and again that he is not acquainted with the tale I shall now rehearse. When he has heard it, I believe he will acknowledge his question to be answered. For we seem to stand upon this earth," she went on, "close-

edged between heaven and hell; and sometimes God deigns to reveal the great deeps of knowledge out of the mouths of babes. To make haste, as many do, to call Miracle! may be to vaunt our experience at the cost of the Almighty's; but that is another sort of boaster who says, Law of Nature! when God suffers a poet to be enlarged. In this old affair of Plessy, which bears points of resemblance to those which gave little Saint Hugh to Lincoln, and to Norwich little Saint William, I neither hint the miraculous nor the natural; but exhibit it rather as it comes, with the marks of time upon its back. Let others reason, not me."

Here begins the Tale of Saint Gervase of Plessy*

"When," said the Prioress, "they asked the priest of Saint Michael-below-Bridge what had become of the boy Gervase, he said 'God hath him in hand;' but this by no means satisfied his mother, whose hands were emptied. So at high noon, when the Lord of Plessy, Roger Monthermer, came riding in to hold a justice-seat, the man and woman, parents of the boy, stood before him in hall — the woman very pinched in the face — and asked a judgment of the matter.

"Said Monthermer, stroking the knops of his chair, 'Recount your matter. I cannot judge causes in the dark.'

"The woman began with a wail: 'So God judge you, Monthermer, if you miss the mark! My Gervase, my pretty boy, my lamb, my first-born, is gone in his flower; cut down, torn away;

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and my eyes bleed to look for him! So beautiful a child! So likely a boy! So hopeful to be a youth!'—thus she repined.

"Monthermer says, 'Shut that woman's mouth. Let me hear the man speak.' So they put the woman's apron over her head, and she went on querulous behind it.

"'My lord,' says the father, a much respected man, who kept the quay below Lene Bridge, 'this is the case so far as we know it. My son Gervase was playing with his schoolmates at half of noon the day before yesterday; at full noon he was not. At a quarter of noon, as some report, a woman stood in the kennel by the Pied Friar's gate; a dark woman, red-hooded, ruddy, with a merry eye. Says she to my boy, "Gervase, I have sweetmeats in my pocket;" and he replied, "Mistress, I have none in mine." Then she, "Put thy hand in my pocket, Gervase, and what thou findest take." Thus laughing he did, but soon pulled his hand out again, empty to all appearance. They say that he put his fingers in his mouth and sucked them. At the prick of noon, I tell you, he was gone, and so was the woman.'

"'How old is Gervase?' asked Monthermer, after a little. He is told, of fourteen years.

"'What manner of a boy?'

"'My lord,' says the father, 'he is a fine open-faced boy, not too saucy; indeed, a modest, good boy, but sharp, and full of tricks among his mates. Dark-skinned he is, like myself, and black in the poll as I am, but grey-eyed after the fashion of his mother. He was a marvellous sweet singer, captain of the singing-boys in the Pied Friars'

Church; and had been mock-bishop on two Saint Nicolas' days. Also he was ever a favourite with the maids, and had a ready tongue. I do believe I should have made a priest of him, or perhaps a religious; for the like of those are great qualities in choir or cloister. Or so it seems.' I give you the simple words of the man.

"Just then the woman pulled the apron from her head, and screamed, pointing at Roger Monthermer.

"'Thou knowest, O head of clay,' she cried out, 'what is become of him. The Jews, the Jews!'

"All the bystanders gaped at her; but Monthermer sat thinking.

"Then he said, 'Shut the town gates and search their quarter. But do no violence.'

"Plessy lies, as you know, on either side the river Lene, which there flows broad and strong and of a brown colour, being not far from the freedom of the sea. East of Plessy the sea is, and there between are the sea-flats; west are the marshes and water-meadows, stretching deep into the heart of the shire, waste, uninhabited, uninhabitable lands. Lene Bridge is midway of the city boundary; and west of the bridge, edging on the river, walled and gated on all landward sides, is the quarter of the Jews, with a synagogue, and a large church called of Saint-Paul-in-Jewry, whither on the day *Passionis Domini* they drive all the Jews, men, women, and children, to be preached (if that be possible) into reasonable compunction for their crowning offence. Now, the day when Gervase was stolen (if stolen at all) was Holy Thursday, and the day when his parents pleaded before Monthermer

the Eve of Easter, the Sabbath of the Jews. This made it a very easy matter to hold inquest, with the whole of them packed in their synagogue.

"They held two inquests, one civil and one divine. For the second, which the Bishop of Plessy took in hand, they made a procession of the church estate, and having first purified it with incense, perambulated the synagogue with cross and candles, and the Host under a canopy. Great indignation was caused among the Jews, who said that their franchise was broken, but nothing was found by these means; nor did the Bishop's sermon, delivered from the words, *The hidden things shall be made plain*, draw any testimony from a stiff-necked generation. No more success rewarded the fatigues of the Mayor, bailiffs and commonalty of the city, who visited, or said that they visited, every house in Jewry. There were many who denied this, saying that such a thing was not possible where tenements were so lofty and visitors so fat. But the result was no more comfort to the parents of Gervase than was the explanation. Those poor souls mourned when all the world rejoiced: there was no Easter for them. The Pied Friars also mourned, since in their church was none to sing the solemn music proper to the feast; a terrible thing for the community, whose fame seemed gone out with Gervase.

"Two days afterward Gervase's mother appeared at Norham very early. Monthermer was yet in bed, but she, pale and strenuous as she was, must see him at all hazard. She did see him, and flung at him all her story. She said she had had

a vision of her boy. She had seen him standing alone and naked in the dusk, with blood upon his mouth.

"'Do you wake me out of visions, woman, on account of nothing better than your own?' asked Monthermer, angry.

"'I know the place, I know the place,' she persisted. 'It is all clear to me now.'

"'Where was the boy then?' he asked her.

"'Oh,' says she, 'it was underground, a wet place near the river floor. The ground was puddled with wet, the walls trickled water, but a little light came in from a hole in the side. The walls were of hewn clay, two piers of old brick held up the vault. There were great worms in there, and slow fat rats, and pools of water; and in the midst my lovely boy, staring, not crying; and naked, with blood upon his mouth. Oh, Christ Jesus!' She wept and tossed herself about.

"'Get you hence, woman,' says Monthermer; 'I am going to get out of bed.'

"When he was dressed he called for horse and sword, drank a quart-potful of beer, mounted, and bid the woman lead him to the place of her vision. She did not hesitate to take the bridle nor to lead him directly to Plessy; but she turned before the bridge, followed Prick-Hart Street and the Flesher-Gate to the gate of Jewry. She took him within Jewry. The door of the Synagogue was shut and barred.

"'It was in there,' she said, 'underground.'

"Monthermer cried to his men, 'Fetch me down that door: and go one of you find the elders of the Jews.' These things were begun. Before the

panels were started three or four old men were brought up by the watch. One of them, with a key on a cushion, offered it kneeling to Monthermer. So Monthermer went into the synagogue, holding the woman's hand; and all the rest followed in silence.

"There was a shallow apse at the end of the synagogue paved with blue tiles, and a recess in that again, which a curtain covered. Towards this, when Monthermer's guide would have led him, the old Jews ran hastily with their arms spread out.

"'Not there, my lord, not there!' they cried.

"'How now, dogs?' asked their lord.

"'My lord,' said they, 'that is a very holy place in our religion;' but before Monthermer could say Pish! Gervase's mother was within the apse on her knees, and her face close to the pavement smelling the tiles. All watched her. Presently she looked up, with the look of one who smells sour, in her eyes a pain. 'Hereabouts they went down with him,' she said. Monthermer began to prod the pavement with his long sword.

"When they had tortured one of the Jews for a few minutes he confessed the way down; so they went through the pavement by a ladder into a vaulted place, very much as the woman had described it; and one brought down a torch of wax. There, standing up in the midst of the vault, mortised, they saw a wooden cross.

"Monthermer said, pointing to it with his sword, 'And what is that doing here, you dogs?'

"A very old Jew with long white eyelashes answered him, blinking, 'My Lord, we have heard

of great things, marvellous doings and miracles, wrought by the Cross of Christ. Therefore we have one here, thinking that perchance it may show us a portent, and change our hearts. But as yet it hath not vouchsafed any such thing.' This was an answer to which none could take exception; at least Monthermer took none. But he was occupied with something else. He went forward and touched the cross.

"'Hounds,' says he, 'it is wet.'

"'Many unavailing tears have been shed on that cross, my lord,' replied the old Jew.

"'I believe that, by Heaven!' cried Monthermer; 'and much besides, you spent rogue.'

"But as nothing could be proved against them, Monthermer (a just man) would not put them to more question or to death. He committed them to the common prison until he was more fully advised, with this solitary grace, that every Sunday they should sit in the nave of Saint-Paul's-in-Jewry and hear mass and a sermon. And this was done from Easter to Ascension. So much for Monthermer, Gervase's mother, and the elders of the Jews.

"Now hear the truth of the matter. The ruddy woman's pocket had been full of some sticky stuff which Gervase found to be very sweet. While he was still sucking his fingers she took his arm, saying, 'Come with me, my dear, and I will give you a bellyful of that.'

"Gervase looked about him, up the street and down the street, and at the woman, who had a merry face. He gave her his hand without a word said, she put herself between him and the

garth, and slipped beyond the gate. 'Now hurry, hurry,' she said in a whisper, and ran, and Gervase with her. They ran up Hunger Lane across the square into the Shambles, crossed Norham Street, got into Prick-Hart Street which is by Leneside; and so came to a gate of blackened brick where an old watchman sat nodding behind his wicket asleep. Gervase did not know the street beyond this gate: it was narrow, ill-paved and dirty, and the houses in it had very few windows, tall as they were. Such as they had were shuttered close. Women, muffled and dark like his companion, but much more pale, and heavy-eyed, stood about the door; some sat on the doorsteps, with their heads between their knees, some were nursing babies, half their bodies bare. What men they met seemed very old, with deep lines on their foreheads and discoloured white beards over their breasts. Gervase saw no boys, no young men, no old women, or very few. There was a faint smell, as of cooked fat, about these silent ways, little air, no sun. All this made the boy pull back. 'Not so fast, mistress, not so fast,' he said, panting rather; 'I don't know whither you will take me.' But she did not slacken.

"'Come, child,' was all she said; and turned a corner then into a lane so narrow that Gervase judged he could have spanned it with his two arms. Also it became necessary that they should walk in file or embraced. The woman chose for the latter course, put her arm about the boy's middle, and had him closer than ever. In this lane, high above him, Gervase saw two women pass a child

across from house to house. There seemed no passengers; but near the end of the lane, suddenly, a youngish woman with very light eyes and a shawl over her head stepped out of a doorway and spoke to the one who had Gervase.

"'Are you sure of him?' she asked; and the other replied.

"'Not yet. Come, and we shall be.'

"The newcomer's eyes swam with tears as she looked at the boy.

"'Oh, he stirs my thought!' she said, and her lips quivered. All this frightened Gervase so much that he stuck his heels into the ground, refusing to budge. The ruddy woman coaxed, rallied, at last cuffed him, but to little purpose. 'No, no, no,' he said; 'I don't like it. I'm afraid.'

"'Help me, Sornia,' said she; and the pale-eyed other, still looking piercingly at Gervase, came edging up, and took his other arm, very gently. Together they got him on round two or three corners, in and out of a labyrinth of close-smelling dark passages, until they came to a green door marked HILLEL. After a knocking, this opened seemingly by itself; and Gervase was led in.

"From this point was no time for protest nor struggling in the dark, nor could either have availed him. But, indeed, after his short fit of jibbing in the street, he had recovered himself. He was at once a sturdy and a sharp lad. Not sure that there was anything to fear, he was quite sure that there was nothing to be gained by trying to escape. Now there was always something

to be hoped for, namely, that for which he had come; and he was quite astute enough to have noticed the way Sornia had looked at him. What followed, therefore, he suffered.

"When they had taken him down some steps, and along a passage which smelt mouldy and was cold, they brought him into a room bare of all kind of furniture but a press in the wall. Here the two women stripped him of everything he had on, then looked him carefully all over.

"'There is no blemish nor spot,' said she who had brought him in: 'all is well so far.'

"Sornia said, 'Quick, the robe; I cannot bear to look upon such sweet flesh.' So Myrrha (that was her name who first got him) went to the press and got a clean linen robe with sleeves to it, all white. This she put upon Gervase, and bound it round his loins with a crimson silk girdle. 'Now all is ready,' she said; 'Come.'

"'What are you going to do with me, mistress?' says Gervase, a good deal scared.

"'You will soon see, child,' Myrrha told him. The other said nothing at all.

"'But I want the sweetmeat you promised me,' says Gervase; 'and then I want to go away.'

"'You shall have it, Gervase,' Myrrha said; 'only come like a good boy.'

"'But I must have my clothes. And why am I in this frock? What is the meaning of such a gallimaufry? I have never been pulled about like this before, let me tell you.' He spoke to Sornia, half crying, though he did all he could to hold an even voice. To Sornia also his words cost as much to hear; she tried not to look at

him, but could not help herself. Once she shook her head, and once held out her arms to him behind Myrrha's back. Thus some sort of secret intelligence passed between them, and Gervase, taking comfort, again allowed himself to be led by the hand.

"They took him down a panelled passage-way, which was lighted by six-branched lamps, into a small room of two doors, where he saw a table, a chair, and a bowl full of white substance, stiff and glistening. 'Sit down and take your filling of it,' said Myrrha. Gervase put his fingers into the bowl and sucked the tips of them.

"'It is the same you had in your pocket,' he says; then sat down and ate some of the stuff. It had a very sweet sharp taste, and was pungent in the nose. He ate for a time, but sparingly; presently stopped, listening.

"'Who are those men beyond the door?' he asked, looking to Sornia. She turned her head away; it was Myrrha who answered, 'They are friends of mine. Eat your filling.'

"'I want no more of this muck,' says Gervase; 'I feel sick.' The two women looked at each other in a queer way. Gervase turned restless eyes about the chamber, wiped his forehead once or twice with his hand. 'Oh God,' says he then, 'I am horribly sick.' And he was, needing all the comfort the pair of women could give him, till at last he was so weak that he laid his head on Myrrha's bosom and swooned off.

"Sornia, white all over, said, 'Dare we go on with this? Have we blood or milk in our breasts?'

"'Neither,' said Myrrha, 'but gall.'

"'Devilry,' said Sornia, in a hot whisper, 'devilry, Myrrha! I had a child once.'

"Myrrha shrugged: 'I had none. Get me some cold water. We must bring him round, the little glutton.'

"'He has been speedier sick than any!' cried Sornia in a fierce taking. 'He has eaten barely a spoonful.' But she went away for the water, and while she was gone a black man put his head in at another door. He was entirely without hair, and had lines like furrows on either side of his nose.

"He said, 'Are you not ready?' and Myrrha looked down at the boy's face lying close against her breast. Gervase was asleep. She shook her head, and the black's drew in.

"The water revived Gervase; he sighed and opened his eyes, but lay where he was and thence looked up, smiling confidently at Myrrha. At this adorable act even her hard breath quickened; but Sornia hid her face in her arm upon the table.

"'You ate too much of my sweetmeats, Gervase,' said Myrrha.

"'I ate very little of it,' says the boy, 'and yet too much.' He shut his eyes again; Myrrha jogged him, asking, 'Can you stand up now, Gervase?'

"'Oh, yes,' says he, 'I can stand up; but you had better hold my hand.'

"Myrrha wiped his mouth and forehead with her apron, smoothed his hair, and then called up Sornia with a 'tst, tst,' in the teeth. Sornia brushed her eyes with the back of her hand, and came forward. Each took a hand of Gervase

(Sornia squeezed that which she had, and was answered again) and went with him to the door at the further end of the room, which had last been used by the black. Myrrha pushed it open with her knee. There were three steps down from it into a great hall full of men in a strong light.

"The light was so strong that Gervase bowed his head to meet it. It seemed solid; but as a fact it came from innumerable candles stuck by the walls. His eyeballs ached, it was sharp pain to look about him; but when he was able he saw a spacious room, dazzlingly bright, which stretched back to an apse and a heavy curtained place. Under a dome in the midst was a small daïs with a stool of red lacquer upon it, and diverse rolls of parchment with silk tassels hanging from them, heaped also on the daïs. All about this, before it, behind it, on the right of it and on the left, were men, sitting on the floor with bent down heads: old men for the most part, with beards, grey, grizzled, and all white: among them here and there he saw blacks. Very dark blue, black, or otherwise sad was the colour of their habits, and all had their heads covered in hoods. Every face looked to the door as he was brought in; the dark floor swam with sudden white: he heard the rustle of multitudinous robes. At the further end, immediately before the daïs, three men stood up, a white-beard with a fillet round his head, a grey-beard, and a hairless black. Gervase wetted his lips with his tongue and took in a sharp breath. He was drawn through the sitting men, by a narrow way in the midst of them; and going, he

heard their hot breath, sometimes whistling like the wind in the keyhole, sometimes thick and short like that of dogs. From one end of the hall to the other, from the door to the daïs under the dome, they led quivering Gervase. There, standing before the three standing men, Myrrha said —

"'Sirs, we present you here a virgin without spot according to the custom of our people. Try him, in the hope that all may be accomplished, even at this day.' The old man, midmost of the three, replied, 'It is well that you do it; for he may live to be a king of our nation, and that King who should come. Give him to us, and begone.' So they gave Gervase's two hands into those of the old man, and went away leaving him there.

"The first thing done to him was to loosen his girdle, take off the robe, and ascertain that he was what he had been reported. The scrutiny was closer, but yet no blemish was found upon him anywhere, save a black speck on one of his upper teeth, which they took off carefully with a file. Then the old man, in a mild and rather fatigued voice, questioned him, and was answered, as follows: —

"'What is your name?'

"'It is Gervase.'

"'Of what age are you?'

"'Of fifteen years, come Childermas next.'

"'Of what condition are your parents in this place?'

"'My father keeps the quay below Lene Bridge; and my mother has poultry, and a small huckster's shop.'

"'Are you first-born of your parents?'

"'I am first-born son; but there are three sisters above me — Ursula and Gudula and Griselda.'

"'Have you brothers, Gervase?'

"'Master, I have three.'

"'Are you a scholar?'

"'I go to school, sir, in the cloister of the Pied Friars.'

"'What do they teach you there?'

"'Singing, sir, and the Christian Verities.'

"'You sing? Sing now to us.'

"Then to all these old men, squatting on the floor with their knees clasped in their hands, Gervase sang like a thrush. Certainly he had never voiced in such a company before, nor in such a guise, for he was mother-naked. These accidents made him uncertain at first; the notes came strangely: but they gushed full flood from him as he went on with his work. You could have seen the sound, like a liquid thing, ripple up his throat. First he sang *In Exitu Israel*, then *Quare fremuerunt*, in a sweet shrill voice; but next, with richer volume, *Pange lingua gloriosi*, and (with a sobbing descant very lovely to hear) *Anima Christi*. Last of all, tired as he was, he sang in a dead hush, on a strange, meek, questing note, with the self-fed rapture of a lonely bird, that hymn of comfortable prophecy, which runs at its close —

"'Pax ibi florida, pascua vivida, viva medulla,
Nulla molestia, nulla tragœdia, lacryma nulla.
O sancta potio, sacra refectio, pax animarum,
O pius, O bonus, O placidus sonus, hymnus earum!'

"At the end of this his speaking voice broke a spell, when he asked, 'Sirs, shall I sing any more?'

"The old man whom directly he addressed was slow to answer him. His eyes were shut, his mouth drawn wide, his face upturned, as if he were still bathing it in the stream of young music. When he did speak it was not to answer.

"'To pierce so piercing a thing,' he said, as if to himself, 'What greater gift can a man make? Such a note might cleave the firmament on the Last Day — and for our sakes do it. Maybe we have indeed a herald and ambassador in this latter end of time. O my boy,' he said fearfully, opening his wrinkled eyes, 'what is the sense of these words you have sung?'

"'They are Latin words,' said Gervase, 'and I know very little about them; but no doubt they are mostly concerned with the blessings of the Catholic religion.'

"The old man sighed, but went on eagerly to ask, 'And what is the Catholic religion, thou strong singer?' Gervase looked at him quickly.

"'I thought everyone knew that,' he said. 'It is the worship of God in Trinity, and salvation by the Cross whereon our Saviour died; most of all it is the benefit of the prayers of our Lady. She, as we understand, cries to God, her Son, night and day for Christian people. And God always listens to what she says, and blesses us. And when He is not blessing us, He is sending Jews, and all Turks, and other Atheists to Hell.'

"The sitting crowd surged all together here, and stopped him with gestures; and some began

to murmur and talk hotly to each other. But the chief old man, staying them with a lifted hand, turned to Gervase again.

"'Dost thou believe all this, O singer?'

"Gervase said, 'I certainly believe it, sir;' and the old questioner looked desperately grey.

"A red-bearded man stood up in the middle hall. Supporting himself on either side by the shoulder of another, he swayed about, trying to speak. But his head wagged, his teeth rattled together, no words came. So he remained, jerking like a man hanged, showing his tongue and white eyeballs.

"'Speak, Malachi,' said the old man. The other swallowed, and in a thick voice said, 'Make him king.' The old man wiped his brow.

"'Well,' he said, 'I will do it if I must, and if it is demanded of me.'

"Then they all cried, 'Make him king! Make him king!' with one voice, which came in two thudding shocks, like waves in volume attacking a cliff: Gervase blenched to hear and feel its vehemence, and stood quaking before his witnesses, scarce knowing what they next did.

"They put on him a red robe with a white girdle; and some one brought a circlet of dry bramble and set it on his head. So apparelled, they stood him between them on the fore part of the daïs, while all the company came, one man after another, and bent the knee to him, saying as he knelt, 'Hail thou, who mayst be our king!'

"There were more than two hundred who thus worshipped him; and long before the end Gervase was so tired that he tottered, and must be

held up in the arms of the old man. A little blood from a scratch on his temples trickled down his cheek to his nose, and made him snuffle.

"At the end of the ceremony, the old man, seeing the boy nodded, gave him a little shake and woke him up.

"'Now, Gervase,' he says, 'prepare thyself. For having done thee the honours of a king, we must do God honour according to the custom of our nation, and according to our hope.'

"Gervase, half lying in his arms, looked up sideways, being scared. His lips went very white.

"'Oh, sir,' he faltered, 'are you going to kill me?'

"The old man blinked. 'We think that thou wilt first die, as blind men reckon,' he told him. 'But this is the hope we have — that that which happened once before (as the Christians report) may happen yet once again, and so this people also be convinced of the truth. For we still wait for our king indeed — namely, him who may overcome death and (as Esaias saith) lead captivity captive.'

"Gervase, you may believe, did not show any understanding of this. He was engaged wetting his lips. When the speech was done he looked up again trembling, and asked, 'What are you going to do to me, sir?'

"'We shall hang thee on a cross, Gervase,' said the old man.

"Gervase looked all round about him from one tense face to another, searching (as it seemed) the eyes of Fate, if haply he could find and read in them the riddle of his troubles. Face after face

he pondered and left; he must have looked into them all. He did not cry, nor tremble at the lips, though his mouth was a little open, and at the knees he certainly did tremble. Finally his thoughtful gaze came back to the face of the old man who held him. But he said nothing.

"'Well,' said that other, 'hast thou nothing to say to us? Is there to be no sign from the edge of life? No sign at all?'

"Gervase, no fool, said, 'Sir, if you please, I should like to say my say to one of the women who brought me here, not Myrrha.'

"'What, not to her who gave thee the sweetmeat?'

"'No, no,' says Gervase in a hurry; 'no, no, to the other one. I will speak to her.'

"They sent for Sornia, who came quickly in and straight to Gervase. The men drew a little apart; she knelt beside him and put her arms about his body, whispering, 'Speak, dear, speak; I am Sornia, that loves thee.' Gervase looked into her face with his troubled eyes, hesitating for words which might express, without naming, his supposed fate. No child either believes in or will talk of his own death.

"'Well, Sornia,' he said, 'I am afraid they are going to do something to me at last. It is a bad business — very bad. Oh, oh, oh!' he sobbed, with a gush of sympathy for himself. 'I can't die, Sornia!'

"She pressed him close. 'Dearest boy, dearest boy,' she whispered urgently, 'thou shalt not. Trust to me. Oh, mercy, how I love thee, my beautiful!'

"'Why,' says he, not looking at her, but with fingers restless on her shoulder, 'Why do you love me, Sornia?' She shook her hair back as she clung to him.

"'I can save thee because of my love, Gervase; and I love thee because once I had a son like thee. Thou hast made me mad for my son. If I save thee, wilt thou not be my son?'

"Gervase looked at her seriously. 'If you say that you will save me,' he said, 'I shall believe you. Will you begin to save me now? Will you speak to these old men?'

"But she shook her head. 'No, my dear, no. They will put thee on the cross and fasten thee there. I cannot prevent it, but thou shalt not die of that. Presently after they will go away, and then I come quickly. Thou shalt not die; it is the terror of the loneliness and the long pains that kill through the cross. Be brave, my boy Gervase, and endure what thou canst. I am very sure to save thee, because of my deep love.'

"'Well,' said Gervase in a hushed voice. And then coaxingly he touched her cheek, saying, 'Come soon, Sornia.'

"She strained him in her arms: 'Dearest, I shall bleed more than thou until I come.'

"Says Gervase, 'I bleed now. I can taste blood in my mouth.'

"She kissed him secretly, rose and went from him without another word. The old man caught at her arm as she turned.

"'Well, what said he, Sornia?'

"She looked him fixedly in the face, her eyes strangely glittering.

"'He said, I cannot die,' she answered. 'And his words are true. There will be no more of this.'

"The old man caught his breath. 'Oh, do you believe it? Do you believe it?'

"Sornia said, 'I do believe it. Do your work, and let me go.'

"Having stripped him once more, they took him down a ladder through a hole in the floor into a place lit only by the light from above, dark else in all corners, very cold, and wet under foot. There was a great cross of wood there, on which they laid him. Then they strapped his wrists and ankles with cords, and did the rest of their work as quickly as they could. One came and muffled Gervase's mouth with a handkerchief. Calling then for help, they raised the cross and slipped it into a socket. Gervase set his teeth, his eyes, the bones of his face. He gave but one short cry when the muscles of his arms felt the wrench and all his flesh seemed one piercing pain: after that he moaned very low as he breathed, or snuffled at the nose. One by one in order came all the company past the cross. To each as he came the old man said these words: —

"'*Brother, you have crucified your king. Why did you so?*' And each answered him: —

"'*Brother, because we believe that we should be crucified, and the king stand for his people.*'

"Then the old man, '*But if he die, brother?*'

"And the catechumen, '*Then we shall know that he is not the king indeed.*'

"After the last man had come down out of the

light and climbed up into it again, the old man turned to the cross with lifted hands, and cried in a loud voice, '*Live, child, if it be possible, and be king for ever after the order of Melchisedec.*' Then he, too, went up, and left Gervase hanging alone.

'It was still quite dark, perhaps not yet midnight, when Sornia with a shrouded lamp crept through the long hall very swiftly, the wind of fear fanning in her pale eyes the flame of love. She came to the ladder, went down it stumbling, and at the bottom felt the wet on her bare feet. 'Pah!' said she, and drew back against the ladder; but then saw dimly the outline of the cross and Gervase hanging there motionless. The rats scurried shrieking into corners, and some tried to run up the walls; the worms writhed slowly, sensing the light; at the foot of the cross stood Sornia, her lamp on high, and wept to see the white body, but wept silently. The great tears chased each other down her cheeks. 'O God in the dark,' she prayed, 'save Gervase, and save me!' She set down the light, climbed the steps of the cross, reached and cut the bonds on the boy's wrists; then as his body fell forward on to her shoulder, she stooped fumbling at the ankle ropes and cruel nails at the feet till she had freed them also. So she brought him down, stiff and cold, and for a little while sat at the cross's foot with him on her lap, peering pitifully into the black beyond.

"She had brought with her a small flat loaf and pipkin of water, but found that Gervase was in no condition to receive of them. At first, indeed, she

feared that he was dead, he seemed so heavy in her arms. This made her frantic to rip off her gown, lay it on the floor, him upon it; then to listen with her ear at his heart, to feel with her cheek at his nose, if any pulse or breath of life might be stirring. He did live. She thanked God brokenly, and began to chafe his limbs. To warm him, she had to lie prone upon him and cherish him with her quick breath. By these means, pantingly employed, he slowly revived and began to moan. Now she could lift his head up a little, to take food and water without choking; and after a while by patient care on her part, a little whimpering, a few tears, he laid his head down by himself and fell deeply asleep in her arms. She tended him as long as she dared let him stay there; then, before it was light, got up, searched for and found a door in the wall of the vault. Of this she drew the bolts one after another, and opening, saw the river darkly flowing below her with a tide not yet at the full flood-mark. There, too, swung a shallop. Sornia swathed up Gervase in her gown, let herself down into the boat, took him after her, laid him surely along the bottom. But this was not all she had to do. She must needs climb up into the vault again to bolt the door as it had been at first. When she rejoined the boat it was by way of the foreshore, being come at that by a roundabout road through the house. Directly she had gained the shallop she cut herself adrift, and pulled up-stream upon the last of the flood.

"She rowed as far as Wickham Weirs, beyond which the tide might not serve her. There she ran

the boat aground, hid it in an osier thicket; and for the rest of the way she had set herself carried Gervase in her arms. She struck over the marshes, going as if guided by an inner light. By noon, fainting with the burden of her love and the burden of the boy, she stumbled into a willow-wood full of primroses and anemones, and sat down to look at her treasure.

"Gervase looked his best asleep. He had very long eyelashes, and a sleek mouth which smiled when he was in repose. His hair was almost black, his skin a clear brown, his nose fine and straight. Awake, his grey eyes were too intelligent for such smooth accompaniments; they consorted oddly with them, made him look too shrewd, shrewder than he was or could have been. Sornia took no stock of this: she had no need, for she loved him already. But she forced herself to see the evidences of his pain, the blue bruises on his wrists and ankles, the swelling of the muscles about the armpits and the groin, the cruel scabbed wounds, the scars left by the thorns. Cupid on the cross! The most lovely being in breath mangled like the Nazarene! But she had saved him for love, and now had him. Over and over again she said to herself, 'Cupid on the cross! Cupid on the cross! Cupid in my arms — Cupid on my breast!' Her transports — for she had forgotten herself — disturbed him. He half opened his eyes, stretched himself comfortably and turned about, looked up at her, smiled, snuggled down again, slept again. And Sornia, watching him, said, 'Cupid is with me. He has been crucified, but I have saved him. Now he shall crucify me.'

"It was late in the afternoon when Gervase again opened his eyes, and tried, in the most natural way possible, to stick his fists into them. But this hurt him horribly because of the condition of his hands, which he could neither shut nor fully open. He was too stiff to move, could not stand up; this way and that he turned, but could get no ease. He began to fret, to grumble and whimper, in pain and in anger at the pain. Sornia would have comforted him if she might, and herself by the same act; but Gervase would have none of her comforting, neither the soft words nor the kisses. Between his bouts of crying he gaped; she judged him hungry; night was coming on apace — what could she do for a lodging? Tired as she was, she got up and lifted him in her arms, prepared to tramp the world till she dropped if she could win him a harbour.

"She walked toward the sunset, following the course of a slow stream bordered with willows. This led her in time to a little bridge that carried a grass track over the water, and on by a turf dyke through meadows to some clumped poplars in the distance. Here she considered a hamlet might lie, and thither would she go. She was right. As she drew near she saw a church tower, some thatched roofs, cottage gardens; here would be food for Gervase if she dare ask it! Woe to her! she knew that she must share her treasure with others for the treasure's sake, and because her worn arms refused a longer burden. In the falling dusk she staggered to the first door she reached, knocked, and fell down in a heap before it, Gervase limp on her knees. A little girl, half naked, tanned, blue-

eyed, with hair like a sheet of yellow floss, opened the door and gaped at her with lips apart. 'Help, for God's love,' said Sornia, 'or my brother will die.' What faint old shame kept the name of son from her, I know not. But 'brother' she called him in her extremity and did herself a bad turn in the end.

"The child at the door faltered, and turning half, called, 'Mother, mother!' twice. A stout woman came clattering out. 'Powers of light, what's this?' quoth she, and clapped-to her mouth. But Sornia had that to say which quickened her motherly blood. 'My brother has been crucified by the. Jews, but I have snatched him from the cross alive. Save him and save me.'

"'Come you in, good soul,' said the woman urgently. 'You shall live to make a joyful Easter yet. Come you in. Persilla, little slut, set milk on the fire. Thank my Saviour there's food a plenty.' The two wayfarers were put to bed.

"Gervase made a quick recovery. In a week he was hobbling out and about, beyond Sornia's control, save only at night, when he slept in her bed and seemed to be under her spell. In a fortnight he had fought all the boys of consideration in the village, earned a secure position, and was Persilla's avowed lover and slave. This fine little person treated him with an entire contempt, which made the lad's case the more desperate. Gervase would have let her bare foot tread upon his neck if she would have condescended so far as to touch him. But Persilla went about her daily affairs without notice of him, and the persistent lover dogged her footsteps, and hung wistfully at a

distance for a chance sight of her blue eyes. Dogging Gervase in turn was ever Sornia, the hungry Jewess, spying after the son she had risked so much to win, tormented by the pain in her heart which told her that if this boy could so lightly forget his mother after the flesh, it was certain he would have no long thought for her, his mother by sacrifice. True enough she knew her words to have been. The Jews had crucified Gervase, but now Gervase would crucify her.

"At night, and then only, she had a force within her which quelled the heedless boy and laid him at her mercy. When it was quite dark, and all the house asleep, Gervase, sitting moody on his bed, would sigh. Then Sornia would say, 'Sing, Gervase;' and he, obedient, would sing to her softly, church music, which she understood even less than he, but which, nevertheless, some right instinct taught her to select harmoniously to her mood. *Jesu, dulcis memoria*, was a great favourite with her, always the call for the commencement of her single joy. As Gervase sang—

"'Jesum quæram in lectulo,
Clauso cordis cubiculo:
Privatim et in populo
Quæram amore sedulo'—

she would draw nearer to him and put her arm about his neck. At the words—

"'Desidero te millies,
Mi Jesu: quando venies?'

this poor blind fool would hold him closer yet; and at the last strain—

"'Tunc amplexus, tunc oscula
Quæ vincunt mellis pocula:
Quam felix Christi copula!'

she made him utterly her own. She would say in his ear, 'By day I have no power; but by night I make you need me. Before your passion you called for me. When you hung upon the cross you waited for me, and I came. Now, Gervase, you need me again. Is it not so?'

"'I don't know, Sornia,' he would reply, and speak the words low. 'I feel tired.'

"She would say, 'Lie down,' and this he would do without a word. She, leaning over him, would mother and cherish him, saying soft quick words, her bosom against his cheek. 'My lamb, my boy, my Gervase!' thus she would hotly whisper — 'Oh, love me a little, my lamb!' And Gervase, hushed and wondering, would answer back, 'Yes, Sornia.' 'Wilt thou kiss me now, Gervase?' she would ask with pride, and he say again, 'Yes, Sornia.' At this, as she urged towards him, looking up at her, he would kiss her softly three or four times, after that call her mother as often as she chose to ask it; and her poor drained heart seemed never full of the folly. But next morning he would have nothing to say to her; nor did she attempt to stop him when he got up with the first light, shook himself, and left her lying, to go out (as she knew very well) and spread his heart to be trashed by Persilla's bare feet.

"For some weeks she lived this double life, of torture by day, when Gervase strayed after gold-haired Persilla, and of uneasy rapture by night, when she hushed the young boy to sleep in her

close arms. Her pure joy was only in the sound of his voice singing. She strained her ear to follow the sense of the great open vowels, the pounding rhymes of triumph, or those which hang back, as if reluctant to leave the lips. She knew when he sang of Mary and her Holy Child, when of the dolours of the Cross, when of the Angel with a trumpet, of the Last Day, of the far fields of Heaven. You and I know these things by precept and inheritance; but she must have had the root of music in her, for while Gervase was singing his heart out, fired by his own art, she could conceive of no power in the world to withstand him, of no law of God which could gainsay the truths so gloriously made manifest. If some such voice as this — so she would dream — should speak the faith of her people out of the dark, what ruling tyranny of bishops or civil lords might abide it? Surely, surely in that guise — as a rapt boy singing — should come the King who was to come! And Gervase? Was he not a king? Had he not been hailed a king by right of this royal property of his? King of her she knew him; and if of her, should he not be a king in Jewry? Remembering the consternation wrought by his singing at Plessy, she pondered this and other things night after night.

"She got everything out of him in the dark, even his devotion to Persilla. She was desperately curious about this; but jealous as she knew herself to be, to the point of venomous hatred of the child, she did not seek — as yet — to make Gervase deny her. Perhaps she feared that this might be above her force; at any rate she con-

tented herself with probing the hurt it gave. Gervase owned to considering Persilla 'in a different way;' he thought her of different stuff from his own flesh; her texture was that of angels; he spoke of her in a whisper. Persilla could not, he said, be supposed to *love* him; the thought was foolishness. Some day he might do that which would move her to *pity* him, and then — and then — here he sighed. His devotion to the little peasant had aged him; it had given a mannish reserve to his eyes, perhaps pushed the down on his chin. If these achievements were in him, they were Persilla's doing; neither the work of the night of torment, nor of Sornia the childless woman. So much Sornia owned to, and was driven back on the only comfort she had; this, namely, that Gervase was still boy and not man. He had no thought of Persilla which was not exalted; she had taught him to feed on air and relish no other food. Persilla (he told Sornia) was a girl of station. Gervase knew quite well what was due to her, what to himself, what to the providence of Heaven which had blazed upon him the miracle she was. Great deeds must be done, giants fought, or perhaps dragons and other baleful worms; long pains must be met and overcome, to which his late experience in Jewry was but the prelude; there must be sea voyages, he supposed; perilous journeyings in desert places, forest nights and days; these, with many more undertakings of the sort, might suffice him for a kiss of Persilla's fingers. To win more than this, or ask more, was a thing not safely to be thought of; no honourable lover went further. Sornia's love, not at all of

this kind, bade her be comforted. She was able to relinquish her claims by day with a better grace.

"Torment came quickly from another quarter: no rest for the likes of Sornia. News of hue and cry after Gervase was brought in by Persilla's father, who had been to Dunham Market and heard strange tales from Plessy, how Jews were in prison, and people hunting for the lad high and low. 'Go you home, my woman,' said he to Sornia, 'comfort your mother and father, as right is. If they think to have lost son and daughter at once, it is a grievous thing, and if kept awake by your doing, a sinful thing. Fear nothing of the Jews, for Plessy gaol is a wondrous soother of wicked desires. Go you home to your mother, my woman, and take the lad with you.' If Sornia was to keep this new child she had dared so much to win, something she must do and soon; but what under the sky? Here you have her between the prongs of a fork. If she hid Gervase with her in the fens, sooner or later as he grew to be man, he would find Persilla by the leading of desire; if she took him home to Plessy, he would be his blood-mother's by right of the womb and the pap. One way or another, the flesh must have him and she go bare. As she peered miserably after her fate in the dark, she wondered, is there no other title to another's soul? Are flesh-bonds all? No, no. There is one other: the church-bond. What if she by virtue of the power over Gervase she had, the power of one who works by night, took him back to Plessy, to her own people, made him of the Covenant, got him owned for king? Agonizing alone in the

daytime, she leapt after that night-thought, and saw her safety there.

"By night Gervase was still hers. Every night he lay rapt in her arms, hers in life and death and earthly member. He kissed her as she bid him, or lay still, called her mother and mother again, answered all her questions, promised her all obedience — and did it — or sang to her without end with a voice that never seemed to tire. So after *Vexilla regis prodeunt*, which ravished her quite by its triumphant notes, that same night she spoke to him, asking, 'Art thou my own son, Gervase?' And he said, 'Yes, Sornia.'

"'Thou carest nothing for thy mother at Plessy?'

"Says he, 'You say you are my mother now.'

"She felt the sting of her own lie, knowing very well that the great testimony of motherhood was not in her bestowal, since she could not let him go. But she asked again, 'There is no love in thee now for little Persilla?'

"He said, with a catch in his throat, 'Not by night, oh, not by night! Persilla is different. She is of the day, but thou of the night, Sornia.'

"'Yes, yes, I know it,' she said hardly; 'I am of the night and work in the night. So I wrought for thee when I saved thee from the cross, and so now when I seek to save myself from it.' She hugged him close. 'O Gervase, O Gervase,' she whispered to him, 'wilt thou do my will?'

"He murmured faintly, 'If it be lawful, Sornia.'

"'Eh,' she said, 'it is above the law. All things shall be lawful to thee if I have my way.'

"'What is your way?' asks Gervase; and she told him, 'It is the way of kingship.'

"'Kingship?' says he.

"'Kingship,' says she. 'I desire thee to be king of the Jews.' Gervase laughed, ill at ease.

"'Oh,' says he, 'that is a strange thing to be.'

"'It is a very easy thing for thee, my lamb,' she said, 'if thou wilt do my bidding, and be subject to me in all things. And first, we must leave soon, and by night.'

"Gervase said nothing for awhile, and even while she urged him would not declare for or against her wishes. For this Sornia cared very little, since she intended to go by night. She knew he would go with her at that season; and Gervase knew that he would have to go. Next morning she saw him follow Persilla into the fields after the cows; she saw them talk with their heads close together; after that, as she fancied, the girl was gentler with Gervase, and more subdued at home. How this might or might not be she cared little; the prospect tempted her to be contented at last. She fixed her night for going at about the sixth week after the passion of Gervase; and before she went sent a message to one in Plessy whom she could trust, that all the Jews were to be in the synagogue on a certain evening named, to see what they should see, what they had hoped for, but had grown faint to expect. Then, the day before she must set out, she hid herself behind a dyke, and watched Gervase take leave of Persilla in the open field. She could not hear what was said, but after a little she saw Gervase spring forward and snatch at the hem of

Persilla's smock to kiss it. Then also she saw Persilla snatch it back again, and Gervase look wretched, and go, leaving her alone. She watched the girl sit plucking the grass, saw her tears fall. 'Let her cry,' said Sornia to herself. 'What else have I done all my days but pray for tears?'

"Gervase had said to Persilla, 'I must go away to-night.'

"She said, 'Well?'

"His eyes flickered. 'It shall be well. When you see me again, Persilla, you will think better of me than now you do.'

"'May be,' she said.

"'I go to Plessy,' says Gervase; and, finding her cold, 'you shall hear of me there.'

"'May be,' said Persilla again.

"'But whatever I do, however honestly or greatly,' says Gervase, 'wit you well, Persilla, it shall be done for the love of you.'

"'How shall I know that?' she asked him.

"'Why, thus,' says Gervase, and caught her gown from her fingers, and kissed the hem of it. She whipt it back again, but never looked at him. Gervase, after a time of fond irresolution, lip-wetting and such like, threw up his head, looking mannish. 'Fare you well, Persilla,' he said huskily. 'I love you, but choose not to speak of that until I can prove my words.' Still she would not look at him, but rather at her fingers fiddling with the smock's edge.

"'Fare you well, Persilla,' he said again.

"'Good-bye, Gervase,' said she. When he was gone she sat lonely in the field and began to cry. Oh, sex of mine, so foolish and so fond!

"He went away meekly in the night with Sornia; who brought him into Plessy by water as he had gone out. He met once more the horrid wetness of the vault where the Jews had tortured him; and here he must bide till the next day with such comfort as Sornia could give him. As she bid him, he helped her to remove the flag-stone which gave on to the upper room; and he had no misgivings, but rather seemed in an apathy, until late in the evening of the day when he heard overhead the trampling of many feet, and a shuffling (as of innumerable slippers) on the pavement, so guessed that the scene of his old suffering was filling again. Then he turned suddenly and caught at Sornia's breast. 'Oh, Sornia!' he said, breathless, 'not again, please, not again!' She kissed him fondly. 'My lamb, my lamb,' she assured him, 'trust me. It will be vastly different now. Trust me, Gervase. I have never failed you yet. Do all that I tell you from point to point, and the cup of your honour will be full. Will you do it, my lamb? I ask of you but a little thing.' It was dark in the vault, the night was upon him and the spell of Sornia's power, but as from a little ray of light came a day-thought to him. 'For the love of Persilla!' it was; so Gervase looked up, saying, 'Do your pleasure, Sornia.' The room above was all hushed. Sornia stripped him of his clothes, and made him put on the red robe and white girdle he had worn before. 'Follow me,' she said then, and went up the ladder into the apse of the hall. Great drawn curtains hid them from what was beyond; the hush held all; yet Gervase's heart beat high, and Sornia heard it

thudding. She put her finger to her lip as if to stay even that muffled sound. Presently then,

"'Sing, Gervase,' said she.

"Out of that empty place, towards the breathless company, whose faces, whose numbers, whose expectancy he knew nothing of, the voice of Gervase poured rich and fast as the honey-gouts from a nightingale's throat, the flood of sound, the gathered strength, the terror and the boding of *Dies Iræ;* and all the Jews scuttled together like rabbits in a close, and gripped at each other by the cloak.

"'Dies iræ, dies illa,
Solvet sæclum in favilla,
Teste David cum Sibylla,'

sang the boy, with the voice of women hurt by a sword; and pausing (as he had been taught) before the third stave, let loose for that a hollow, fluting and lonely note, like a clarion that warns a valley from the hill-top —

"'Tuba mirum spargens sonum
Per sepulchra regionum,
Coget omnes ante thronum'—

under which the Jews lay prone and still. But they shuddered and smote their foreheads at the wailing of *Quid sum miser;* and to the sweet cajolery of

"'Recordare, Jesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuæ viæ;
Ne me perdas illa die'—

they lifted up their arms with one accord, and all their anguish and apprehension escaped in the flutter of a long sigh.

"Gervase sang the great hymn like one inspired from Heaven. The *Ingemisco*, the terrible *Confutatis*, *Oro supplex* the pitiful, the *Lacrymosa*, which would have melted a mountain of ice — all the great hymn down to the prayer of *Huic ergo*, where it ends in the whisper of contented faith, *Dona eis requiem!* he sang: and at this calm close Sornia went swiftly to the heavy curtains and pulled them apart with a fierce gesture. There they saw Gervase in his red robe, standing erect and clear; saw him, knew him, and remembered.

"'You Jews,' said Sornia, biting the words, 'look upon him whom you pierced, who has now pierced you by means of that deathless part he has — and answer me now. Will you own him for your king?'

"But the Jews seemed not to hear her, but they rather huddled together like sheep, not moving their eyes off Gervase, who stood lightly there, obedient, easily disposed, ready to sing again, assured. At a sign from Sornia he began a new song, lifting up his head like one glorying in thought and music together: '*Salve, capui cruentatum*,' it was; and the Jews trembled. Some shook their heads, with hands held up to deprecate, and some rocked about because they could not weep, and some lay still on the floor, cowering before a vision of the Last Things. Once more he sang — that old sequence which begins, *Ecce sacerdos magnus;* but Sornia stopped him in the middle, because she saw that red Malachi was prepared to speak and because she wished to give him something to speak of. The

hour of her triumph was at hand, the wine of it thrilled her voice, lit her pale eyes.

"'O Jews,' she cried out, 'behold your king, who has overcome death and you together. Bind him king unto you by a crown instead of a cross, and yourselves unto him by the Covenant. Bring the knife and the napkin, for he is content to obey the Law, that you may know he is above the Law.' Malachi was crawling along the floor on his hands and knees, while all the others watched him. He crept so up to Gervase, and touched his hands and feet where the white scars shone. Then he turned suddenly with a shout, and leaped back into the body of the hall, which surged about him, alive with men. 'Listen, O you people!' he raved, hoarse as a hog, 'this is a true thing, we have proved it true, by which all hangs, the doctrine and the hope, the faith and the baptism and means of defence. Go you up, touch him and see. We gloried in him, we saw him lovely and without spot. Yet we dared to try him, hang him up, leave him to die. Oh, impiety of our unbelief! Oh, unregenerate still! But he was content to suffer, he was meek, he hung and he died; and now is come again more glorious than before, with the marks of his torment gleaming like stars. See, try, probe for yourselves, and then follow me, and confess him for king.'

"Sornia laughed from a full throat. 'Are you satisfied at last, O Malachi?' she asked; and Malachi said awfully, 'I am satisfied. Now I shall become a Christian man.' So said all the Jews with tears. They flocked about Gervase, hailing him as king; then with one consent ran clam-

orous through Plessy to the house of the Bishop. Sornia sat alone on the floor of the synagogue, Gervase beside her: but she could get no speech out of him, and her power seemed to be going, though it was still night.

"To the great concourse of Jews, 'How is this, dogs?' said the Bishop, very cross.

"'My lord,' said Malachi, 'if you please, there are no dogs left in Plessy. We have seen with our proper eyes the truth of what your religion reports. To-morrow you shall baptize us all. Jewry is emptied of unbelief.'

"'By no means to-morrow,' said the Bishop, 'but on the day of Pentecost, a fitting day for this holy business. But first I will hear the grounds of so pious an act.'

"When he had heard it, he was greatly astonished. He sent for Gervase at once, to be lodged with him in his house and not seen of any until the rite was done. He sent word to Monthermer, to Gervase's parents, to all others concerned. He made full preparations for this great and wonderful baptism, believing with Malachi that by its means he would empty Jewry. Yet with Malachi he was wrong. There was one Jew left: Sornia, with a gnawed heart, childless as at first, hopeless, quite alone; Sornia, who had supposed that love asked again of the beloved.

"On the day of Pentecost following, after the solemn *Missa de Spiritu Sancto*, sung by the Bishop of Plessy himself, there stood up Gervase in the sanctuary, vested like a bishop in a white silk cope and mitre, holding a pastoral staff, upon

the forefinger of his right hand a blue ring. But his hands had no gloves, nor were there any slippers on his scarred feet. King of the Jews, the Jews of Plessy confessed him, weeping and laughing at once as they knelt at his knee. His first kingly act was to order that the gates of Jewry should be cast down and burned — and this was shortly done. Sornia, too, was in the church, who neither laughed nor could weep, but felt the knife griding in her heart, and knew now the depth and height of her tragic folly. She had feared the mother of Gervase, and the desire of Gervase; she had esteemed the Church-bond a light thing and measured strength with that. Now she knew how light it was.

"When all the Jews had been baptized, at the going-out from church in pompous procession there was seen a little shrinking brown-faced girl with hair like a gold sheet over her back. She was clad in a coarse cotton shift such as country children wear, and had bare brown legs and arms. It so happened that she stood on the edge of the crowd hard by Sornia, who was deeply hooded. Seeing her as he passed, Gervase (for all his stiff sacro-sanctity) stood still. Sornia saw his mouth twitch, heard what he said, though he whispered it below his breath. She went by the shaping of his lips: 'Oh, Persilla!' was all; and then he was pushed on in procession. Persilla limped after him, holding her rags over her neck. One of her feet had been cut by a stone, and bled as she went. Afterwards Sornia saw her crouched against the great steps of the Bishop's house, on the ground, by the lowest step of all. The child

was looking at her hurt foot; and some venom in the galled woman prompted her to draw near when no one else was by.

"'Ah, Persilla, do you bleed for him whom you scorned?' she said. 'So do I bleed, who saved, never scorned him.'

"Persilla lifted her young head.

"'I never scorned Gervase,' she said. 'I loved him. He knows that now. He saw me here.'

"'How will that help you, little fool,' cried the other, 'when the Church has him fast?'

"'I don't understand you,' said Persilla. 'He is made glorious. They will make him a saint, and I shall be happy, because I love him.'

"'Do you call that love?' asked Sornia.

"'I don't know,' said Persilla. Sornia dragged herself away, and sat on a doorstep to watch the Bishop's house. While she was there, a man and woman passed by her, their children, three grown daughters and two young boys, with them. The woman was highly exalted, speaking very fast.

"'I tell you, master, I give him gladly!' she cried. 'What honour to our name! What honour to this old bosom of mine, to have suckled a saint! Never talk to me of my title, my claim! Our Gervase a Saint of the Church! Glory and thanks be to God my Saviour, I say. And so should you say, master, or it is to your shame.'

"The man grunted, but the woman's voice flew behind her in a streamer of pride as the party went their ways to the Bishop's house. Sornia knew them for the father and mother of Gervase. So his parents gave thanks, his sweetheart gave thanks for the Church's robbery? But Sornia had no thanks

to give; but tasted the salt as it surged up into her mouth.

"At a conclave held after dinner the Bishop gave it as his opinion, that Gervase was holy *de substantiâ*, as good as canonized already. 'For,' said he, 'if a young boy, *mero motu ejus*, can turn the wicked hearts of so many Jews, what might he not turn when he should be fortified by age, by holy living, and the prayers of all the faithful in communion with the Faith?' There was no answer to this. He went on to say, that it behoved the Church to keep Gervase, as to the *accidents* (if so he might put it), apart from defilement. In his judgment, he should inhabit the hermit's cell by the Chapel on Lene Bridge — there are two such cells on the bridge, but that by the Chapel is much the larger — to be a living light and ensample to all Christians, and to all Jews, if there should be any more. Pilgrims would come from many lands, much edification ensue. To this the Mayor, having the advantage of the town steadfastly before his eyes, gladly consented; adding, that the Commonalty, out of the town chest, would repair and make habitable that hermitage, which had been long — too long — neglected. Meantime he submitted to his Grace, whether Gervase should not be in the Sacrist's lodging in the Cathedral Close?

"'He shall live with me,' cried the Bishop, 'my honoured guest!'

"So it was arranged; and the parents, the brothers and sisters of Gervase were allowed to kiss him if they would. His father would not, it appears; but his mother kissed his hand, not

being worthy (as she declared) of nearer approach; and his brothers and sisters, one by one, knelt before him, as Gervase laid his hand upon their heads in turn. After this ceremony, performed as it was with great dignity, the company dispersed; and the girl and the woman, Persilla and Sornia, were left with the street to themselves. There they sat apart while the dusk gathered about them.

"Very late in the evening, the Bishop's door opened, and Gervase, looking tall, apparelled all in white, came out on to the steps. Persilla looked up but did not move. Sornia watched from across the way.

"'Persilla,' said the boy.

"'Yes, Gervase.'

"'I am worthy of you now.'

"'O Gervase!' She got up and went towards him. His finger touched his lip.

"'Hush, my dear. I may not love you now. But you may love me.' Persilla held up her arms to him.

"'I do love you, oh, I do! I always loved you!' she cried with sobs.

"'Then do my will,' said Gervase. 'I am to live in the chapel hermitage on Lene Bridge. Do you live in the other and be a saint like me. We may love safely then; for we shall each be holy. Will you do this, Persilla, in God's name?'

"'Yes, Gervase,' said Persilla; 'but once you shall kiss me.' He drew back.

"'Oh, no,' he said, 'I dare not. It would be a sin.'

"So then she turned away her head, and im-

mediately he was down the steps to her level, close to her, and had her small face cupped in his two brown hands.

"'Look at me, Persilla, look at me,' he said. 'Against my thought I was made holy; but the thing is done, and it is glorious, I believe. So many Jews! Many have been made saints for less; but I see plainly that saintly I must live and saintly die, lest God be proved mistaken in me. And oh, my dear, be thou saintly too! Face to face on the bridge, we shall see each other; so, perhaps, side by side we shall lie in grave, and side by side win Heaven. Shall it be, Persilla?'

"She said, 'Yes, Gervase,' and quickly and eagerly he kissed her once; then turned and went in. Persilla stood hugging herself awhile before she walked away into the dark. Then she walked directly to her ruined hermitage, facing Gervase's on the bridge, and there stayed immovable. Sornia was left alone.

"Those two hermitages on Lene Bridge with their two young tenants were the standing wonder of twice two shires. Pilgrims came from oversea, many cures were wrought, things stupendous and (to this our unhappy age) well-nigh incredible were done. Call nothing, however, incredible. Saints Gervase and Persilla were lights to their day, and may be (for all we know) lights to our sons' day. Why not? If simple lives lived simply, and innocent deeds done single-mindedly, or pure motions which spring from honest beliefs can ensure saintship, then Saint Persilla, then Saint Gervase, may well have their crowns. They knew no better and did no evil, either of them. But the greater was

Saint Gervase, who converted all the Jews in Plessy by mere simplicity."

This pleasant, edifying tale from the Lady Prioress brought forth emotions of various kinds out of its hearers. Percival was grateful to his mistress for her justification of his singing voice; Mawdleyn Touchett, whether she saw herself in the part of Persilla or not, displayed Persilla's soft rapture in her speaking face; but the face of Master Richard Smith was compact of winks and incredulity. "I'll not deny miraculous fluting in a chit of a boy," he said to the Scrivener, as they rode together snugly under the green hills of Kent; "but you are not to tell me that a long person of this Thrustwood's inches hath the twitter of a girl in his gullet for nothing. No, no, by Saint John of Beverley, I know better." The Scrivener replied that he also knew much better, and what he knew would impart to the Shipman on an early occasion. He added, that the Prioress' tale, saving her reverence, was nothing out of the common, since he had acquired a dozen of the sort in the course of learning his letters. Three or four of these he offered to relate then and there to his good friend. "For here we are at Wrotham town," says he, "and a fair ten miles before us if we are to arrive at Boxley this night. That is a long road to travel, at past noon, mind you."

"You shall tell me your tales, Master Corbet," said the Shipman, "when we are stretching our legs by the Abbot of Boxley's wood fire. Just now I am not easy in my mind for thinking of

that Thrustwood who comes from Glo'ster without a Glo'ster name — and there's the truth, if you must have it."

"I can make you easier on that score," replied the Scrivener; "for I know more about him than you do. Know then ——"

But what the Scrivener had to say of Percival Perceforest is out of the tale, as the Saga-men say.

THE SHIPMAN'S TALE

THE SHIPMAN'S TALE

WHAT the Scrivener said to the Shipman overnight sank in deep water and sent up bubbles. So soon as the pilgrims were fairly on the chalk road which takes you out of Boxley, Smith claimed the right to be heard.

"Madam," he said to the Prioress, "let the tale be mine this day. Believe me, I have a design in asking." So said, he looked shrewdly at Percival, who avoided him.

The Prioress was gracious enough to allow his plea. "The design we shall look for, Master Smith," said she, "must be in the tale, if you please, and no deeper in you than to make you our entertainer."

"Content you, madam, content you," replied the Shipman. "I will entertain you liberally — and older friends than your ladyship — if I am spared to see the Head of Thomas."

Thereupon he began his discourse, which he called

THE CAST OF THE APPLE

"If the old Romancers are to be believed," he said, "the ways of lovers were not so diverse as you might have supposed. For however fondly they loved, whether out of measure or within it, when occasion was that faith should be tried or

danger averted by means of disguise; however simple that disguise might be, one person was always deceived by it: I mean the lover. So in the tale of young Paris, loving the fair Vienne, the Dauphin's daughter of Auvergne; whom a king's son also loved. Now Paris had been banished for his presumption, and Vienne, because she would not consider the case of her royal lover, cast into prison. But it is well known how, by means of an old hen under her arm, she deceived the king's son; and how again Paris, having performed prodigies in the Holy Land, returning to Auvergne, deceived her in her turn with no more disguise than a palmer's gown and cockle.

"So Flors was brought to his mistress Blancafior in a basket of greenstuff, and the Soldan of Babylon, who loved her as much as ever he did, seeing the pair asleep, lightly believed them to be sisters and was made a Christian at the first glance.

"But I have a case where there was more excuse for the lover. Here he was deceived from the beginning. He loved, but knew not whom he loved; he sought, he found, but could not tell whether what he sought had been found, or what he found sought. His device, whereby at last he was made sure, is a good one. It was adopted, as no doubt you remember, by the notable Captain Ulysses on a famous occasion. This lover of mine, called Sagramor, was younger brother of Sir Belem of the Red Fell — the second of three, whereof the third and youngest was Sir Herlouin. I see him a tall, sanguine-hued young man with a pointed

beard, a singing voice and generous eyes. I know he had a great heart and am sure he was a lover by predisposition, because his name in chivalry was Le Bel Enemy. All students of this exact and elegant science will understand the import of such a name. It meant that his comeliness made Sagramor the foe of his friends, his generosity the friend of his enemies. No handsomer thing could be said of any man. It was, in fact, found too handsome by the elder, Sir Belem, who at the time this tale begins had banished his brother.

"Sir Belem of the Red Fell was lord of thirty valleys in the County of Salop, with a tower at the head of each. Chirk was his, and Chirbury, and all the black lands between Rhiw and Berriew, rivers of North Wales; of Clun Forest he had as much as was good for him and more than was good for many. The king believed him a great bulwark of the Marches, and Belem was of the same mind: to that end he chose to live in his Castle of the Red Fell, whence (like an eagle from his eyrie) he could watch in fair weather the dominion of Wales, the broad plains, the rivers, forests and girdling mountains of that unsubdued plot of earth. Chiefly he could see — as he most desired — Powys, and in the midst of it the white stronghold of that grim old vavasour Sir Caradoc; I mean Sir Caradoc of the Graceless Guard, old in years, older in sin, insatiably proud, who had made the green plain a haunt of dread, and the good towns, that shone once like eyes in a fair face, pools of restless fear. Sir Belem, a tyrant in his own way, was jealous of such a tyrant as that. Round about his Graceless Guard Sir Caradoc

ruled as a thief may rule thieves. 'Rob me and you will be robbed,' was what he said to the terre-tenants; and they knew very well, without dots on the i's, that he was their only stay and comfort against the English barons on the March — excellent thieves, of whom Sir Belem (I take leave to say) was one, and not the least excellent. So the men of Powys, lest a worse thing should befall them, suffered the old land-pirate Caradoc to pillage them as he would — him and his seven sons.

"Seven sons he had, no fewer; and that was the litter upon which Sir Belem kept his weather-eye. They were cat-a-mountains all, a vexed brood, whose names were these: — Gaunt, and Merlyn, and Pereduc, Ros, and Garyn, and Meskyn, and young Lewknor, who proved the hardiest; handsome tall lads, black-polled, all in hue fair red and white, all thieves, all great lovers, and all but one damned. You will hardly ask me now whether Sir Caradoc's lady was alive. She was not, but had died giving birth to Lewknor de la Garde, to him and one other twin with him, a girl called Audiart. The people of Powys called her the Dark Rose, and said that no one could tell her from her brother Lewknor. In England this was held to imply that she was a termagant; but no reliance can be put upon English consideration of the matter, since Audiart had never been seen over the March, unless indeed the tale be true that she sometimes rode out with her brothers in Lewknor's clothes.

"Now, in the days when Sir Sagramor of the Red Fell first went over sea, and when Sir Herlouin was a growing lad at the Red Fell, one from

the Graceless Guard (it was supposed, Pereduc) stole Sir Belem's wife Helewise, and kept her five years in Wales against all that Sir Belem could do; after which time, this Pereduc being tired of her, she was ready to die, and did die. Sir Belem said little, that not being in his way, but he did as much as he could, and pretty well. For Dame Helewise had not been dead more than a year and a day when, as he was hunting a stag, he came unawares upon three of his enemies — Gaunt, Ros and Meskyn de la Garde — lying at random in a grove of birch trees hard by a fair stream. Gaunt was asleep, Meskyn mending a bow, Ros had his feet in the water while he sang. Sir Belem, grim and speechless, took them all three, bound their hands behind their backs, and drove them before him, like cattle at the goad's point, to the Red Fell. That which was terrible about Belem was his silence. If it had made Dame Helewise his wife glad of Pereduc, so long as he was glad of her, and even when he was not, to prefer death to her husband; if it had made Sir Sagramor take service with the Count of Hainault — judge to what length it drove these proud, chattering Welsh youths. It made Gaunt and Ros and Meskyn de la Garde first rage, then foam, then weep with raving, then swoon, and last submit like mutes — all the spirit scared out of them by a wooden English knight. Sir Belem made hinds of his prisoners: Meskyn, a mere lad, was turned afield to be crow-keeper; Ros became cowherd, and Gaunt, a very noble young man to all appearance, a plough-teamster in the marshy lands about Severn.

"Immediately news of this became known Sir Caradoc levied war upon Sir Belem, and drove him to sore straits to defend all that he had. The Welshmen came up in hordes, held all the passes and threatened all the towers. It was not so much that vassals failed the Englishman as that his borders were wide. Sir Belem, who had but one single purpose, was content to wait its fulfilment; but meantime he made his youngest brother Herlouin a knight, and thought it well to do what I am sure he had no taste for, I mean to send a messenger oversea to summon his second brother Sagramor with horse and arms to help them. There was no love lost between this pair; Belem hated Sagramor as the night the day; but when a gentleman has thirty valleys to defend and a grudge to feed into the bargain, he has no time for quarrelling with his brothers. And much as he hated Sagramor, badly as he had used him and badly as he meant to use him, he knew that he would come. So the devil, as they say, loves to see the cross upon a bond.

"But the English roads were still waiting for Sir Sagramor le Bel Enemy while the Welshmen poured over the border. Sir Belem drew back from valley to valley, until it came to this, that he was besieged in his castle of Red Fell, and could only hold that with the demesnes about it. It was no pleasant sight for the great brooding man to see his good lands covered with Welsh pavilions; and yet he had to endure a worse. Every day Sir Caradoc de la Garde, with three of the four sons left him — one to carry his banner, one to ride on his right hand, and one to ride on his

left hand — rode up the valley and was acclaimed by those he called his liegemen, haggard rogues all of them, with hoarse voices and sudden small hands. Upon his tower-top Sir Belem sat grimly, nursing his sword and his hate together, speaking never a word. So then old Sir Caradoc, his white hair blown about his fierce face, bareheaded as he always was, would ride close under the very walls and cry out, 'Come down, Belem, thou dumb dog, and I will hang thee for my sons' sake.' Belem, immutably patient, said never a word, and would not kill the old man yet; rather, he gloomed the more darkly, his eyes fixed always upon the brown valley where a shrunken river, brabbling among rocks, ran its journey into the heart of England. The streams fell either way from the ridge which was the Red Fell, east into England, west into Wales. From the east, and up this rocky valley Sir Sagramor must ride with his men, since no other was open. Yet a full month before he could be looked for Belem had caught Pereduc de la Garde in an ambush and hanged him up on a tall tree midmost of the Welsh pass. He did not know that he was hanging the ravisher of his wife; but his brother Herlouin and all his vassals knew it quite well. When next Sir Caradoc came up against him he was without a banner-bearer, but still with a mailed son on either side his horse. And this time, though he rode as before, bareheaded, courting destruction, under the outer wall of the fosse, he called out no injurious invitation to Sir Belem; but he lifted up a tight, wizened face, whereon sat desire grinning like a dog.

"You may suppose that he judged his son

Lewknor either too young to bear the weight of mail, or too dear to run the risk of Sir Belem, since he was content to be without a banner-bearer. That he could dock himself of so much pride has an air of fear. Venturesome old merchant that he was, he had come to a point where he dared not have all in one bottom. Two sons he had left to be esquires of his body; one should be at home in case of new sorrow. He never expected, though I hope he deserved, the sorrow that befel him when, that same night, he made a fierce attack on the castle of Red Fell, and an attack of torches, smoke, haste, scrambling, and hot crying. The Welshman bridged the fosse and heaped brushwood about the inner bailey, meaning to set it alight. This fire would have served to cover scaling-ladders and murder; there would have been no sound throats in the Red Fell, had not Belem been speedier than his assailants. He himself it was who had the doors set open before they had kindled the wood, but not before the party of the castle was primed to make a rush. The Welsh, taken by surprise, were forced back upon their bridge: there and thereabouts was a hot half-hour, all done by guess-work in the dark. But Garyn de la Garde was drowned in the fosse, and Merlyn trampled beyond recognition by his own men; the rest saved themselves as they could. They drew off without their dead, not even knowing who was dead; and for two or three weeks there was no sign made.

"Sir Caradoc, as many judged, should have been broken by this tragic night which had robbed him of all his tall sons; but Belem judged otherwise,

and rightly. The old Welsh robber, as proud as fire, had a bodyguard still to flaunt in Fortune's face, and for this reason, because he would demand of him the uttermost farthing, Sir Belem stayed where he was in his castle until his enemy's pride should prove his final ruin. Surely enough a day dawned, a day of level milky light, when they of the Red Fell saw Sir Caradoc come up from Powys, riding as aforetime between two mailed knights, his troop of reivers and robbers behind him; and a low chuckle from Belem — like the gloating of a kite over a meadow — made young Herlouin aware of a new turn in the game. Bright as a beam of the sun up the eastern valley came riding Sir Sagramor le Bel Enemy in gilded armour, he and his friends, homing from England's heart.

"Young Herlouin looked from east to west, from west to east; and presently he spoke with a gush of pity in his voice. 'Here, brother,' he said, 'is your enemy at his last shift, who (to maintain his estate) is forced to put under armour the tender bodies of children; and these his last, and one of them a girl. Let us show mercy, Belem, at this time. Unmask him, strip him, show him a braggart: but have you not yet had enough of his flesh? Three of his sons you have dead, and three in thrall; what worse thing can you do him than leave him alone with his memories? And as for these pretty children, what harm have they done, or what can do?'

"The youth spoke urgently, not without tears; but Belem never turned his eyes from the east where Sagramor his brother showed with thirty-

five spears behind him. He had his great horse apparelled, armed himself from head to foot, and laid his bare sword across his keees; he did nothing more, and said not a word. Again Herlouin urged him; this time he turned his back. Then Herlouin saw that Sagramor was aware of the opposing force; he saw him turn to his companions, he saw them spur, he saw the horses plunge at the steel and quicken. It came into his mind that Belem meant to do his butchering by deputy, to serve both his hatreds at once — kill the children of his enemy and fasten upon his brother the shame of the fact. Herlouin, boy as he was, grew red in the face and swore the thing should not be.

" He slipped away from the tower where Belem stood with his friends watching the game, got out of doors by a little wicket, scrambled to horse-back and spurred towards Sagramor, intent upon reaching him before it was too late. This he was just able to do, but no more. The two lines were ready to engage in the open ground before the castle, drawn up in line facing each other, some two careers of a horse apart. Into the middle space came Herlouin, stooping low to his horse's neck, at a hand gallop. Sagramor saw and knew him. 'Hold, brother, hold, Sagramor,' cried the boy, panting; 'be advised what you do!'

"'Dompnedex!' says Sagramor with a high head. 'Brother Herlouin, I shall do what becomes me.'

"'By my soul, you will not,' says the other; and Sagramor,

"'How then, if I punish the enemies of our house?' His eyes, very fierce, glittered between

the bars of his visor. These sort of interruptions were not at all to his taste.

"But Herlouin was sure of his case. 'Let man meet man,' he said, 'and the better man prevail. But, Sagramor, make no war upon a boy and girl.'

"'How now?' says Sagramor; so then Herlouin told him how Sir Caradoc had lost his six grown sons, and was attended now by a boy on his right or left and a girl on his left or right, twin children of a dead mother, whose joint ages might scarcely exceed his own. He told him that one or other of the old Knight's esquires was his daughter Audiart, and one his son Lewknor; that which was which there was no telling; that as for the rest of the Welsh host, they were rapscallions, lick-pots, lackeys, varlets, dog-bolts, stable-hinds and gallows-birds of Powys, unworthy of the arms they bore or of those now offered against them, servants and panders of old Caradoc's ruining pride. He ended — 'Will you draw upon children or tilt against cattle-thieves, Sagramor?' And Sagramor in a great heat swore 'By our Lady, I will not.'

"'Sir Caradoc de la Garde began to taunt the good knight for delay, and might have forced a fray upon him but for diversion from another quarter. Out of the castle rode Sir Belem in his armour, and his vassals with him — Brian Longescu, Maynard Tregoz, Sir Bartholomew of the Spiny Brake, Sir Matthew of the Reidswire, Sir Cuthbert of the Mynd, and other gentlemen of Salop, heavily horsed and accoutred with long shields and spears at rest, as if to fight with

Saracens at Roncesvalles, or brave the slaughter of Aliscans. Directly he was aware of Belem Sir Caradoc spurred out to meet him more than half-way, a bow-shot at least in advance of his men; and on either side of him those last gallant slips of his tree pushed on level, abreast, as if their hearts danced in unison. 'Fight me now, Belem, thou red felon,' roared the old Welsh Knight, and shook his spear. Deep in his throat spake Belem for the first time, saying, 'By God, I will.' And then as he made himself ready he gave the signal to Sagramor to charge the Welshmen in flank and so pen them like cattle.

"But Sagramor threw up his spear-arm in token that he must speak before he did anything. Once more the Welshman paused to hear him. Then he said, 'Brother Belem, I am advised that Sir Caradoc has brought out his two children — all that he has left — in armour, and that one of these is a young virgin. They tell me that the rest of his following are villeins pranked in the mail of good knights. If these reports be true you know better than to call me on. If they be not true, let Sir Caradoc deny. But I believe they are true, and therefore I will do one of two things: I will meet Sir Caradoc himself (as his due is) in single combat, on horse and on foot, and give a good account of myself, as I hope; or let him stand aside with his imps, so unarmed, with a flail in my hand I will pound this rascaille as it deserves. But, Belem, you shall not require me to go a-tilt against hinds, nor do battle with a young boy. There were better customs in England before I left it.'

"Sir Belem, who saw his plan spoiled, was furious. 'Is this your custom of oversea? Is this your loyalty? I spit upon you, recreant.' So he said; then to his followers, 'Pass avant! Follow Belem!' The whole long line of his men set spears in rest and drove in the sharp spurs. Old Sir Caradoc turned in his saddle to give warning to his host; but Sagramor, seeing that he and his two squires must be swept up and devoured by Belem before any support could reach them, Sagramor, I say, uttered a sharp cry. 'Dieu nous garde! This is massacre, not war. On my side, Herlouin,' he said, 'follow, follow close!' He cantered out in advance of his company, they pressing after in due order, with intent to interpose his force between Belem and his prey; and this would have been done if Sir Caradoc, hungry and thirsty for death, had not rushed in to meet it. But so it fell out that the three companies met in the midst with a thudding shock, and that Belem was on terms with the father of his thief before any one could comfort him. At the first onset Belem sent the old knight headlong to ground, thrust through the gorget with a spear. He pinned him to the earth and left the spear sticking there; then drawing sword he would have gone on to yet more dreadful slaking of his dry heat. Seeing which, Sagramor with a mace clove a way for himself through the vassals of his house, once his friends, intent to defend from their fury those who had done them the first wrong. 'Put up, Belem, put up!' he shouted in a high voice as he wrought; 'do those innocents no harm, or by Heaven I shall repay it on thee!' So he said, and smote

right and left, trying by all means to get at his brother. Close behind him pressed Herlouin. But they saw the two armed children side by side engage the man who had overthrown their father, and knew that it must end as it must, without any instance of their own.

"Sir Belem played with their wild sallies as a great cat may handle a mouse, when she is full of idleness as well as vice. Temptingly he opened guard once or twice, whereupon they, with the mad spirit of their father surging in them, came on furiously and at random. So presently, with a light flicker of his blade, Belem cut at one of them and shore through the plates of the neck-piece, so that the helm was loosened and fell off sideways. They saw him falter at that, even with his sword shivering in mid-air ready to strike. It would seem that shame smote even him when out of the ungainly trunk of steel, to look upon the ruin and raving, the dust, the clamour and the blood, there beamed forth the smooth pale face, the wide eyes, the rippling dark hair of a grave young girl. Hither and thither drove the press of battle, swirling like a whirlpool in the tide, while Belem sat gaping at his deed.

"Spurring at last came Sagramor to the place. He swung his mace about his head, struck downwards, and splintered the sword of Belem his brother. 'Oh, shame to our father's blood!' he cried with trembling voice, 'What hast thou done, Belem?' He looked at the girl, she steadily at him; he hung his head, he sat adroop, thoughtful on his horse. But Belem, recovering himself, quick to the advantage, snatched at the spear

which, transfixing old Caradoc's throat, still swayed like a pole in the tideway; with a wrench he pulled it out, then aimed a buffet sideways at Sagramor — a foul blow. Over against him that other armed child of the Graceless Guard got between him and the girl; but Belem was now intent upon his brother, pressing him with shield and short sword so as by any means to have his life. Herlouin took his chance to get the girl out of the mess, pressed forward and confronted her and her armed brother. Backward like the long wash of a wave came the battle, and swept him, the boy and the maid, into the main stream of strife.

"As they drifted hurtling together, young Herlouin, for honest ends, lifted sword and voice above the din. 'My prize, my capture!' he cried as he strove to disarm the Welsh boy. But at the words Lewknor de la Garde threw himself forward upon him: Herlouin felt his hands at his shoulders, heard him grunt as he tussled and tried for mastery. 'Never your capture, English wolf!' he said between his teeth, whimpering and fretting at his lack of strength. 'Let loose, little fool,' says Herlouin; 'I am doing what I can for you;' but to no purpose. Either he was past the sense of the ears or the lust of murder was upon him; possessed at least by some devil he slipped from his horse and clung with his full weight upon Herlouin's neck, endangering both their lives. Seeing which a friend and vassal of the Red Fell — Maynard Tregoz by name, a valiant knight of Salop — let drive at Lewknor with his axe, and hitting him fairly on the top of the head, split his helm clean in the middle, so that the two halves

fell apart. The hands parted from Herlouin's neck; Herlouin was free. A universal cry went up on all sides: here on the ground before them was another girl in all points like the first: the round smooth face, the pouting rich mouth, curling hair, fringed eyes; and over all rage and awe, shame and high blood, clouding, flushing, paling, leaping, dying, like a mountain fire. Herlouin, looking dreadfully upon the sight, crossed himself. Was this the girl and t'other the boy? Had he, all unknowing, wrestled with a virgin? Were both of them girls? If so, had a girl so nearly had him down? God knew, in a generous youth this was no time for nice considerations. Here, it did seem, were two girls in a man's affair. They must be got out. 'Man or maid,' says Herlouin, 'I fight you no more. Trust me, and help me get your sister out of this.' He spoke as he hoped, not as he knew; and first his enemy looked at him with a hint of fight left in two hot grey eyes. But then, 'Get her away,' he said, and Herlouin thanked his Saviour for knowledge. By labour and heat, by hard knocks not a few, by shouting himself hoarse, by prayers, entreaties, and his horse's rump, he got a way made for them out of the battle. Side by side they came out, and side by side rode off down the valley into Powys; and it was pretty (where so much was grim) to see the care each had for the other. But for the life of him Herlouin could not tell—when their backs were turned—which of them it was had called the other 'Sister.' Certainly, a more beautiful pair, or a pair which made franker coparcenry—whereby the girl took boyish looks

and the boy girlish — he had never hoped to see.

"To consider now the fortunes of battle: no living Welshman, except Lewknor and his twin sister, left the ground. Most were slain, the rest bound prisoners; yet in the midst of swords sheathed or sheathing the two brothers of the Red Fell fought like tigers, Belem to have Sagramor's life, Sagramor to disarm Belem.

"So by the grace of God he did. Belem lies on the ground, Sagramor, spent and breathing deep, leans on his mace looking at him.

"'Belem,' says this good knight, 'you have sought to take my life.'

"'By the fiend,' says Belem, 'and I will have it yet.'

"'I think not,' Sagramor replies; 'but let that be. So long as I remain on life you will do no more injury to the Graceless Guard. For the evil deed of one man there six men have paid the price. As I see the matter, it is now time for you to reflect that you are a Christian, upon whom forgiveness of sins is by God's counsel enjoined. Let a love-day be proclaimed, establish a peace, and I spare your life, otherwise — I have you disarmed below me. Choose what you will do.' What choice was there? Belem gave Sagramor his word, intending to break it, and Sagramor gave Belem his life. He let him go free, him and his men; but himself would not enter his father's house.

"This troubled Herlouin, the youngest of the three brothers. 'What will you do now, Sagramor?' he asks.

"'Brother,' said Sagramor, 'I shall go to pray, hoping thereby to rid my soul of all earthly stain, so that a clean, sweet chamber may be prepared within me.'

"'But who shall be guest to sit in this chamber?' asks Herlouin; and Sagramor told him, 'the most lovely lady now in the world.'

"'And who is your lovely lady, Sagramor?'

"He said, 'My lady Audiart of the Graceless Guard is the lady — in whose face Awe sits still, and Grief, and Holy Fear.'

"'Aha,' cries Herlouin, 'then you saw what Belem and I saw: the young girl in the midst of battle.'

"'Brother, I did,' said Sagramor; and Herlouin said, 'I saw as it might be two such girls.'

"'Sagramor said, 'So did I, God help me.' Then Herlouin kissed him, saying, 'May He be with thee, Sagramor my brother, and give thee thy fond desire.' So the brothers parted, Sagramor rode away alone towards Powys, yet not across the border; but stayed rather at the hermitage of the Ford, and there spent his days and nights in prayer and fasting and scourging his bare bones with the discipline. Herlouin, for his part, having no open quarrel with Belem, chose to remain at the Red Fell; for he thought, 'certainly Belem will not give over his blood-feud for an oath let slip in the article of death. It may be that by staying I shall do Sagramor a service.' So he endured as well as he could the stark silence, the meditation of murder, and the worse than meditation, with which Belem filled the house, keeping close watch on whatever might

be intended against the Graceless Guard. The first thing was that Belem most villainously slew those wretched thralls that he had, Gaunt and Ros and Meskyn de la Garde, and stuck their lean heads on spikes outside the gatehouse. Herlouin took this shameful news down to his brother.

"When Sagramor heard it he defaced his shield and spoiled the crest on his helm; which done, he gave up his lodging with the hermit of the Ford and went down into the plain of Powys, to the Graceless Guard. Standing up there, bare of all cognisance, he cried out in a loud voice, 'Take heed of the renunciation of a good knight,' over and over again until they of the castle were aware of him, and came out on to the tower to hear what he had to say. Those two twin persons came out; so Sagramor saw again under a veil of steel the lady of his heart, though which of the two were she he could not tell.

"One of them calls from the tower, 'Who art thou, renouncing there; and what dost thou renounce?'

"Sagramor, baring his head, cries, 'I am Sagramor of the Red Fell, brother of the false knight Belem; whom now I utterly renounce, and with him my blood, name and arms.'

"Then the speaker from the tower asked him, 'Wilt thou serve us, Sir Sagramor?' and he said, 'Yes.' So the other then, 'Come into the castle and help us; for we are only two here now, Audiart and Lewknor, brother and sister, and all the rest of our kindred and household slain by Sir Belem. Come in, therefore, and help us.' But

Sagramor lifted up his right hand, saying, 'By my soul, I will not come into your castle until I am worthy of its glorious tenant, my lady Audiart, whom I love and serve in the dark.' To this no answer was returned from the tower, though brother and sister looked quickly at one another; so Sagramor stayed below in the weather with what comfort he could suck from the near neighbourhood, refusing all manner of meat or sustenance from within doors. This went on for many weeks.

"After a time it came to young Sir Herlouin's understanding that Belem was compassing a great new villainy against the Graceless Guard, namely, to attack it in strong force, kill Lewknor, and serve Dame Audiart as her brother Sir Pereduc had served his wife — that is, to wed her by force. Herlouin rode down into Powys by stealth and told the news to Sagramor, whom he found much aged and very cold, standing by the outer gate. 'Let Belem come,' says Sagramor. 'I am ready for him.' To Herlouin the good knight seemed by no means ready; but he let the two within the Guard know the story, and they made ready, after a fashion of their own.

"They sent out a messenger to the Red Fell, a certain Welshman called Owain, a priest. Belem was at meat, Herlouin with him. 'Bring in the priest,' he says; so they brought him in, a thin-faced man, pinched with cold, for now was the winter weather come into the March.

"'My lord,' said this priest, 'this is my message to you from my master Sir Lewknor of the Graceless Guard. You shall ride alone to the Guard,

and unarmed, so you shall take away the bride. But if you come armed or in force, your brother Sir Sagramor shall have her.'

"'Do you take me for a fool?' says Belem. 'What proof have I that you meditate no treachery against me?'

"'Sir,' replied the priest, 'my master has provided against your reasonable doubts. He himself will be hostage for your safety. This is what you shall do. Let your brother Sir Herlouin come first in arms to the Guard. My master will give himself up into his hands, and will so remain until you have obtained her whom you seek. Will this content you?'

"'By no means,' says Belem; 'for they may have their Graceless Guard filled with men.' The priest with a fierce cry knocked his breast.

"'Ah, would to God that they had, Belem!' he said. 'Then I had never been here on such an errand. But now in that great castle there are only two, Lewknor and his sister Audiart: the others all slain, and by you.'

"Belem says, 'Good, I agree to your proffer. Sit down and eat.' But the priest would not.

"So it all was done. Lewknor de la Garde met Herlouin in the midst of the snowy pass about the time of the going down of the sun. He was unarmed and bareheaded; and Herlouin saw that his hair, black as a raven's wing, fell rippling to his saddle. Also he had a cold, beautiful face, a mouth shaped like a girl's, and as soft. Together the youths went down into Powys, and Audiart let them into the Graceless Guard.

"Outside the gate, upon the trampled snow,

Herlouin saw an armed knight on watch who, from being motionless as a figure of stone, when Dame Audiart came and stood in the door, went down upon one knee; but said nothing, neither looked at her. Herlouin, for his part, did look from the sister to the brother, and back again, marvelling that such likeness and diversity could at once consist. She was of the same height to a hair, of the same goodly proportions, and (with the difference proper to a maid) of the same shape. Not that she was richly endowed with the grace and treasure of women; otherwise, being yet very young, she was slight, boyishly made, rather than not. The dark lashes of her eyes were no longer than his, nor her cheeks, nor her chin, nor her mouth more delicately soft. Herlouin looked at her hands; they were small. So were Lewknor's. He saw her foot, and judged Lewknor's, if anything, the smaller. Her hair reached her middle, and his went just so far. But at this time she was clothed from neck to heel in white silk, after the manner of brides, and on her head she had a little fillet of silver leaves, like the leaves of a box-tree. Such a lively sympathy beat between the pair, that when Sir Sagramor dropped upon his knee and the girl grew red, so also did her brother Lewknor — very beautiful to see.

"Then she spoke, asking, 'Will you serve me, Sir Sagramor, good knight?' and Sagramor said, 'I will serve you utterly.'

"'Then,' says she, 'take my brother Lewknor here for esquire of your body, and keep him from the hostility of his enemy, Sir Belem. Will you do this?'

"'Lady,' says Sagramor, 'I shall do it. But what will you yourself do?'

"She told him. 'I go to expiate the blood-feud between my house and yours. I shall go home with Sir Belem.' Sagramor cried out in his pain, 'Oh, horrible, you dare not do it, nor ask us to allow it.' She, smiling bitterly, 'Do you not know that I am of the Graceless Guard. Is there anything, upon our own showing, that we dare not do?'

"Sagramor sternly said, 'There is one thing that no maiden dare to do;' and she bowing her head, responded, 'That thing dare not I. Yet they who love me trust me.' So it was Sagramor's turn to bow down his head. Whereupon she came and put her hand upon his shoulder, saying, 'Do you trust me, Sagramor, who say that I have your love?'

"He replied, 'I do trust.'

"'Stay here then,' she bade him, 'until you see me depart between Sir Belem and Sir Herlouin. Wait for my brother Lewknor, and treat him well for my sake.' When Sagramor looked up at her it was to be seen by the light of the new-risen moon that his eyes were wet. 'Lady of my love and duty,' said he, 'I shall obey you in all things from point to point. But if I may never see you again whom I shall hold in my heart until my life's end, I shall beseech of you one favour.'

"'Name it,' says she.

"'It is,' he told her, 'that you kiss me once.' Again she grew very red and hesitated for a long time; again Lewknor blushed. But afterwards she consented, and Sagramor got up and kissed

her on the mouth. Then she with Lewknor and Herlouin went into the Guard to wait for Belem.

"Two hours after moon rise, as they sat waiting, they heard his horn at the gate. The three of them looked suddenly at each other, rather at the pale discs which they knew to be their faces, for nothing else could they see. Then Audiart whispered to her brother, 'Lewknor, go and let him in.' So he went away and opened wide the doors of the hall, next the gate of the inner bailey, and next let down the bridge, and lastly set open the gate of the outer bailey. Then Belem rode into the hall, and drew rein; and they saw horse and man stand like statues looming in the dusk, with Lewknor beside them barely reaching to the rider's knee. For once he had kept his word, being without spear or sword.

"I have told you he was a silent man. Any other would have said, 'Madam, I have come,' or 'Madam, here am I;' but Belem said nothing at all. But the fever which griped Audiart moved her to ask what she knew perfectly well.

"'Who art thou, horseman?' saith she: and Belem, 'You know who I am. Come.'

"She says, with a sharp-drawn breath, 'In a good hour I come;' and got up from her place and came forward.

"Her brother Lewknor, whose fear (to judge from his bungling) seemed wilder than her own, put a long black cloak over her, shaking as he did it. Herlouin went to help him. 'Courage, friend,' said this young man under his breath; 'I ride along with them, to do what I can.' When the girl was made ready, Lewknor led her forward;

Belem, stooping, lifted her under the arms, and set her before him on the saddle. So without a word he turned and rode fast out of doors; and Herlouin with all the speed he had mounted and followed after, leaving his brother Sagramor with young Lewknor alone in the Graceless Guard.

"Now follow those who first departed. The three of them rode under the moon from Powys into England over hard ground upon which lay a powder of clean snow. Not a word was spoken until they reached the Red Fell, dark and enormous, before which stood one with a torch to show the way. Dismounting first and in haste, Herlouin helped down Audiart, Belem consenting. He, when he had got off deliberately (being stiff in his joints), faced his young brother, saying shortly, 'Now, Herlouin, go your ways. Here is no lodging for you.' Herlouin — a pretty good judge by this time — thought to hear murder in his voice. 'By my Lord God, Belem,' he replied, 'I leave you not this night.' Said Belem, 'A dead man you remain, but not otherwise on my wedding night.' Herlouin laughed. 'Oh, Belem,' he said, 'do your murdering on me if you can; but until that is done or not done you do not touch this lady.' Belem sent the groom for his sword, and Herlouin said, 'Fetch mine also, Simon;' but Belem, 'Fetch my sword only.' It was plain that he meant to kill his brother.

"Then spoke that still and hooded lady Audiart. 'I see in you, Sir Herlouin, the mettle of a knight. Now I ask you, enter not the Red Fell, but leave me alone with Sir Belem. To-morrow at the crowing of the second cock, come to this gate,

and I will let you in.' Belem gave a gross laugh, took the girl in his arms and kissed her. This made Herlouin furious. 'Two of my brothers have saluted you, sister,' he said; 'now you shall greet me in like wise.' So said, he also kissed her in full sight of Belem; and as their mouths met she whispered to him, quick and low, 'Trust me, O Herlouin.' Without any knowledge to bottom his faith so he did, and turned and went to his horse. He saw her go in with Belem; he saw the torch follow: the moon took up again her cold spell over the world. They lit no candles in the Red Fell; he heard nothing, saw nothing, no cry, no moving light. With what spirit he had in him he set himself to watch out the remaining dark hours, scarce daring to think of what might be doing within the house lest he should remember what had been done there before.

"The first cock crew far down in the valley or ever the day-dawn shivered in the east. His cry found Herlouin before the gates, peering for sign of life or some assurance in the great blind house of something beside death. Then as the light came timorously, stealing over the snowy waste, he heard the sound of men riding, who seemed to be coming from the west. His heart stood still, for he thought, 'If that should be Sagramor my brother, come to call me liar and coward.' And he knew then that it could be no other, and dared not go to meet him.

"The second cock crew, and behold, a long splinter of light stream like a bar across the east. 'Alas, for faith given fondly!' said Herlouin to

himself: 'now Sagramor will kill me, and will do well.' Even as he spoke the gates of the Red Fell opened; there walked out a youth clad in green, bare-headed, pale and grave-eyed, whose hair fell rippling to his middle; who greeted him, saying, 'Benedicite, Sir Herlouin.' At this sight, to see Lewknor come out when Audiart had gone in, Herlouin reeled in his saddle, having no words in his throat, nor wit in his head to have conceived them. At that time came riding up Sir Sagramor, and with him, marvellous to be seen, that very same youth whom they took to be Lewknor — bare-headed, pale and grave-eyed, clad in green, with dark hair falling to his saddle-bow. Herlouin, gaping from one to another, turned and spurred towards Sagramor. 'Brother, brother, we are bewitched! I came in with Audiart and now have Lewknor!'

"'No, no, Herlouin,' says Sagramor, 'I have Lewknor here.'

"Says Herlouin, 'Come and help me to see then.' But Sagramor spurred on ahead of him, having but one thought.

"Springing from his saddle, he confronted the youth in the gate. 'O thou, whoever thou art,' he said awfully, 'tell me the fate of my lady Audiart.'

"The youth said, 'Come and see.' So Herlouin and Sagramor followed those other two into the castle; and over the inner gate was a spiked pole, and on the top of the pole the head of Belem, grinning in death. But the heads of all the sons of Graceless Guard were gone from the spikes where they had been stuck, and so were the spikes themselves.

"Sagramor said nothing, because he was thinking, and Herlouin nothing, because he was unable to think; but presently Sagramor smote the face of Belem with his gauntlet, saying, 'Thou felon thief, Belem. For this only I grieve that it was not I who set thee there.'

"Turning then, he said to the three others, 'Follow me.'

"When he had led them into the hall, to the top of it, and made them sit down, he went away, and shortly came back with a jug of wine, some bread and apples. They sopped their bread in the wine, and broke their fast. Then Sagramor took three apples. 'Catch, Herlouin,' he said, and threw him one of them. So he said to the youth who sat next to Herlouin, and so did. The apple went low down; but Lewknor (if Lewknor this might be) clapped-to his knees and caught it upon them. Once more Sagramor took an apple, and saying 'Catch, Lewknor,' threw it to the second youth. This other Lewknor, to receive it, opened wide his knees, so that the apple fell through them to the ground; then instantly Sagramor with a glad cry sprang up from his place and caught the bungler kissing in his arms. 'Thou art Audiart and my dear love,' he cried exulting, 'with whom I have journeyed all this night!' It was very easy to see the truth now by her manner of answering. Then Sagramor turned to the real Lewknor, and kissed him fondly. 'Oh, thou brave knight,' quoth he, 'here was honest trickery indeed. Now tell us how thou faredst this night.' So Lewknor told them what had passed between him and Belem; how when they were within the house Belem had

sent the bride to bed, and the bride, obedient, had lain long, waiting in the dark. Presently Belem comes in, ready for bed, with a lighted lamp held on high, that he might see and not be seen. What he saw was this, a youth in green sitting on the bed with his chin on his knees, and his dark hair all about him like a mantle.

"'Who art thou?' says Belem; and the youth, 'I am Lewknor of Graceless Guard, last of my father's sons.'

"'Why art thou here, last of my enemies?' says Belem; and Lewknor again, 'For my sister's sake.'

"'You do her no service, fool,' said Belem; 'death is here.' Lewknor replied between his teeth, 'It is here. Take it, you big dog'; and leaped upon him and bit him in the neck. Belem threw up his head as he grappled, and by that means Lewknor got his own head well under the strong man's chin. Belem struck downwards at him with the lamp, which was put out; but Lewknor drew his knife and drove it into Belem's ribs. So the tussle was done; 'and the end,' says Lewknor, 'you know.' Sagramor looked up with tears. He took the two hands of Audiart in his and kissed them. 'O brave sweet Audiart,' he said, 'now let our joint life make amends for deaths so many and so bitter.'

"'Amen, Sagramor,' says she, 'God helping us.'

"What more is there to say? There is nothing, save this, that those two loved greatly; and that Lewknor de la Garde, following the English fashion, cut his hair short.

"And I would to God," added the Shipman, facing round upon the unfortunate Percival, "I would to God, Jenny Perceforest, that a shorn poll were all the fault which thy parents might find in thee!" Percival was only just in time to take his right foot out of Mawdleyn's stirrup and by a gambado forced upon his horse to drown this deep saying deeper in sound. Although it disturbed him, it brought a certain relief. He edged up to Master Smith, saying, "My good companion, I see now what perturbs you. You take me for my sister Jane. Heaven help you, man, she is mother of five by now. You will oblige me, however, by keeping my secret for another day. By time we reach the Shrine of Saint Thomas you shall do what you will with it."

The Shipman looked earnestly at him. "If so be, Jenny," he said, "that thou art mother of five lawful imps, the greater the shame of thy polled head. Where do I stand to thee-ward? What of old sakes, old times, old vows, 'twixt thy mouth and my mouth? And if I am hurt to see thee dance attendance upon an italianate cut-throat, an ambusher, a blood-pudding man, what shall thy husband do, and babes crying at home? Fie, Jenny, fie! But, for the thought of old days dead I will keep thy prayer. When it is so that thou comest to me petitioning, thou shalt not find me backward."

"Benedicite!" cries poor Percival. "What more can I say?"

PERCIVAL PERCEFOREST'S TALE

PERCIVAL PERCEFOREST'S TALE

"For our last tale," quoth the Prioress, "my niece Mawdleyn shall choose the teller."

"Oh, Piers," says she, "I choose you."

"Madame," said Percival demurely, "is it your pleasure that I obey Mistress Touchett?"

"It is my pleasure, Piers, that you please yourself," the Prioress answered with a little soft sigh. Percival began very soberly.

"If your ladyships please, and your good masterships, Tacitus saith of a great governor, that he was '*Omnium consensu capax imperii nisi imperasset*'; a saw which holds good of a certain Count Galeotto Galeotti, gentleman of Mantua in days gone by. On the other hand, of Eugenio, coëval with him, if you are disposed to cry out—

'*Infelix, utcunque ferent ea facta minores!*'

as was said of Lucius Brutus and his sons, the reply might be open to me which Livy hath from Cato the First, saying, '*In hoc viro tanta vis ingenii inerat, ut quocunque loco natus esset, sibi ipse fortunam facturus videretur.*' But I am not to take sides: otherwise Eugenio——"

Dan Costard here looked sternly at the speaker, and put him out. "All this latinity is mighty fine, young man," he said; "but pray do you remember our conversation of overnight, when I confessed you?"

"Very well indeed, father," Percival replied, with a spirit which showed most becomingly in his cheeks. "Be patient with me and you shall hear the tale of

Eugenio and Galeotto.

"My ladies," he continued, "it may please you to understand that in the days of the fame of Mantua, when Guido Gonzaga was Duke, and Petrarch the glorious poet his friend and councillor, there was living in that spacious city of silver and red a young gentleman named Galeotto Galeotti, expert in arms, snug in means, in person sleek, in manner amiable, a very good friend to himself; but most of all the servant of ladies. On that last quality he grounded his hope of making a stir in the world: to see him an ornament of the Court was to have little doubt of his success; to remember him at home, pattern son of a pattern mother, was to have none at all. Singing to the Duchess, hawking, riding afield with the Duke, he was gayest of the gay — light-hearted, impertinent, seated dextrously in the mean, not quicker than most to take offence nor slower than any to give it; in a word, a perfect little point-device knight-in-velvet. At home, he read the philosophers to his mother, he made little nets of string (very useful in the fruit season to keep away the blackbirds), was a patient and not unsuccessful angler, kept the accounts of the household expenses and balanced them to a *quattrino* every week, and held discussions with the curate after dinner upon subjects suggested by the Countess before she left the table. If a

courtier should be all things to all men, he was exquisitely a courtier: if cheerful sufferance is his badge, that was the badge of Galeotto Galeotti, Count of the Empire.

"It must further be said that if bald ferocity tempered by wit is the sign of your tyrant, Donna Giacinta, the widowed countess, was triple-crowned. In those piping times when Mantua, cradled snug in her reedy lagoons, was the city of Petrarch and Duke Guido, minstrelsy and art expanded and lolled at ease under his mild rule; but the Contessa Galeotti saw to it that in her own domain art and minstrelsy wore braces. She held the palace of her husband's ancestors — a proper palace of stone, escutcheoned, adorned with statues and classical inscriptions — close to the Ponte Mulina, looking out over the flecked stretches of the middle lake, the air of whose cool chambers throbbed always to the thunder of the weirs, and very often to that of her exhortation. NEC DEVS INTERSIT NISI DIGNVS VINDICE NODVS, was the legend which ran the whole length of the pediment: no god ever intervened while she was at home; but the motto (apart from that particular application) pointed very well the character of a family always remarkable for its submission to fact and recognition of the importance of Providence. For in days by-past, wherever the service of high Heaven had lain, there had stood a Galeotti to claim his wages. And none claimed more stoutly or expected more deliberately than the Contessa Giacinta, whose skin was tight on her sharp bones, but her hold on the reins of family tighter still. Over that recording house

by the bridge, over the orange-garden sloping to the lagoon, over the greater garden (where cypresses and Roman deities stood ranked, as for a game, on the grass); over house and land, man-servant and maid-servant, ox and ass, Donna Giacinta stood with a staff in her hand and twinkling black eyes in her head — a stern, wise, laconic old lady. *Nec deus intersit*, indeed! Donna Giacinta was quite of that opinion, and taught it to the whole of her house. The lacqueys grew acolytes, the maids vestals under the shadow of her square jaw. The majordomo had a sinecure tempered by severe trembling fits. Most of all, the young lord wore a face of beatific suffering — meekness struggling with enthusiasm — and changed his boots for slippers whenever he heard the staff of his lady mother chastening the flags. An unhesitating tongue, a piercing eye, a brain above the average, a firm reliance upon the logic of events, and such a family motto, are quite enough tools to direct a leopard's claws withal or bend demurely the whiskers of a cat. So, within doors, the Contessa Galeotti bent the whiskers of the Count her son.

"Leopard enough — 'alla gaietta pelle' — the young man was when daily he left his mother for the service of his Duke; and as for his whiskers, if he had had any, I assure you that at court, with the Duchess's ladies or Gonzaga's gentlemen, they would have taken a very upward twist. Let it be so. 'Bloodshed, rapine, sudden deaths, breaking of laws, of homes, of heads,' said the Countess; 'Such things are the routine of courts. Break all the heads in Mantua and all the commandments

in the world, my good son; but break none of mine. I am not responsible for the general conduct of the Universe: you shall reckon with the Church for your breakages there. Within these four walls, however, my concern is plain: here you account with your old widowed mother.' And 'Benissimo, mamma mia,' said Galeotto Galeotti, Count of the Empire. Fortified by which daily advertisements, daily he went singing from the Palazzo Galeotti to the Corte del Castello.

"His way led him, after skirting for a few paces the water-fretted wall of the lake, into a narrow street which they of Mantua call, apparently for no other reason, the Via Larga. It might with equal force have been called the Via Longa, since it is no more a long than a broad street: its name is really its only interest. Tall white houses, unwindowed to the first storey, rise on either side of it; these storeys project upon pillars, and while they keep rain and sun away, form tunnels for the wind and diminish yet further the slip of blue light you could hope for overhead. But they afford pleasant window-space for the inhabitants. The women sit at work in them all day, orientally recluse, able to see all and be seen little — a state of the case which was found conform at once to their and their husbands' needs. In that day there were houses of well-to-do merchants in the Via Larga.

"It was down this little street of quiet and discretion, then, on a certain spring morning that the gallant Galeotto Galeotti went singing, with May in his blood, love in his mood; with one green leg and one white leg, a tooled leather

doublet, scarlet cloak and plumed scarlet cap; his hair frizzed like a bryony-brake, a tap-a-tap of sword on paving-stones very inspiriting to hear, and a smile on his cheerful face. If he was not a handsome he was a wholesome youth to look at. His teeth were good when he laughed, his eyes grey shot with light, his hair brown, his eyebrows, his ears, all that they should be. The scar on his right cheek was an honourable addition; besides, he could woo with the left. Wooing just now, with May begun and his mother at home, was in the air: he had a pretty, hunting eye for any chances of the season. So as he went he searched the upper windows, like a falconer who casts his bird at random; and in an upper window of the Via Larga he had the enchanting vision of the back of a girl's head.

"In May, in Mantua, you can set the heart a tune with less than that. A girl's face, even, would do it; but the back of a head is mystery. Galeotto's heart bounded as he brought his heels together short, to adore this girl's head. Ostensibly he looked at the sky — since one does not commit one's self — where over a deep blue bed fleeces of golden cloud were drifting in the idle wind; actually he pored upon that upper window, where through the dusty glass he could discern the bent, industrious, pious, pretty head. It deserved the adjectives (his own), for the prettiness was undeniable, and the attitude implied needlework or the Hours of the Virgin. It was a small head, as a woman's must be, a round head, a head of brown hair softer and sunnier than any's of his own family; a head, finally, whose river of hair

flowed further than he could see, seemed to be unconfined and (as he would have sworn) to be rippling to a curled end. He judged it to be that of a very young head, and burned to see the face it curtained so deep. Was it honey pale, was it serious? Were the eyes in it grave and watchful, or iridescent with gentle malice? or provocative eyes? Did ardour leap in it, as in a leash; or was it rosy, perhaps, with laughter in the curves and mischief in the dimples, which (like eddies) play about a girl's quick face? Thus very Mayishly he mused; and just then saw the head uplift, strain back against the window and rest there inert, while the hair, flattened by the pressure, made an aureole for this young saint. Our youth was thrown into a sympathetic ecstasy — and certainly the figure is a beautiful one; he addressed the skies. 'Oh, thou Well of Pity,' he said, 'thy postulant is weary of beseeching thee! Or like a nymph, whom some grudging peasant has caught in the pastures and caged, she beats at the bars of her growing body, restless for her proper food!' I think that here he strained the figure; but he was very much excited. 'By the Light upon Paphos,' he swore, 'I must see that sainted face!'

"Some such authority gave him the chance; for a heavy porter, lurching up the Via Larga with a bale on his shoulder, drove him suddenly to the wall.

"'Zounds! you mole,' cried Galeotto, 'must you for ever blunder and gentlemen pay the bill? For three seeds of cummin I would run you through the ribs.'

"One or two foot passengers stopped to listen.

"'My lord,' said the porter respectfully, 'the proportion is immoderate, as is your pursuit of science. For an astronomer, as I take your honour to be, the night is your time for observations. You are out of season, my lord, and thanks to me also, your honour is now out of the road.'

"An old friar who was, or should have been, passing, laughed at this sally, and so laid the lines of the great train of logic I am about to draw. For it is quite certain that if the friar had not laughed the porter had not bled, that if the porter had not bled, Isotta had not —. But I anticipate. It is also clear that if to be bumped out of a love-ecstasy is offensive, to be laughed at is maddening: one act of madness is to think red, the next is to see it. Messer Galeotto, greatly nettled, drew his sword; it came out with a sound of *swish*, and went in below the porter's ribs with a sound of *slick*. The porter cried 'Misericordia!' and the crowd, 'Gesù!' The street filled, all heads were out of window, among them the fair young head of the devotee who had innocently caused these griefs. That would have been the moment for Galeotto to continue his observations of the blue, and to do him justice he used it so, until the things of earth — a *posse* of the watch — engrossed his thoughts by encompassing his body. He did see, in a flash, an eager face, all fire, intelligence and expectancy; he did see, for a second of time, a pair of red parted lips, a pair of wide eyes, a fine young neck on the stretch, a stream of light on a pretty shape, a vision of softness and white: but no more could

he see, for the blades were out. He was engaged, amid the gutturals of a delighted mob, in cloak and sword work. His back was to the lady's door, his crooked left formed a screen for his digging right; the swords glinted and shivered, the crowd surged, blood flowed; the porter's body might yet have been floated out to the placid reaches of the lagoon. In any case it must have gone ill with our Count of the Empire who, if he could fight his man, could not possibly fight his half dozen. So the lady seems to have thought. 'They will kill him unless I interfere, Nencina,' she cried, half turning to the room. The room must have shrugged, for she did so; and went on to watch the desperate adventure below. Presently, 'This is foolishness,' she was heard to say to herself; then she turned altogether and disappeared. In a few minutes more the bolts flew back, the door opened; she received into her arms the honourable burden of Galeotto's back. Stumbling in, blessed beyond his hopes, deep in porter's blood and his own, deeper in love, but deepest in peril of the cage, the youth had sufficient wit left to play the part of prudence before he declared himself a lover. He pushed-to the door, barred it, bolted it; then fell upon one knee before his preserver, and slightly varying the legend of his house, did deprecating homage with the words, '*Nec dea intersit nisi dignus vindice nodus.*'

"With the watch thundering at the door the time was ill-judged for paraphrase; the young lady looked calmly at Galeotto. 'I am no latinist, sir,' she replied; 'but I suppose you refer to the death

of the porter. He was in my father's employment —a useful man. However, we have a substitute in you. You are wounded, I see. This noise is deafening. Come away from the door and I will help you as much as I can.'

"'Madonna, the wound is internal,' said Galeotto, still kneeling: 'it is in the region of the heart.'

"The lady looked grave. 'It is worse than I thought,' she said. 'But I will do my best.'

"'Ah, your least is my salvation!' cried the happy youth, and kissed her hand. She received the homage with great composure: but affairs were really urgent.

"'At this rate,' said she, 'we may expect the door down and a full house in twenty minutes. It is no time for gallantry. Please to follow me.' Galeotto obeyed her as rapturously as a stiff leg allowed. She took him without a word to that upper room whose depths a little while before had thrilled him with romantic imagining. Once there, he submitted to her ministry, finding in every little cry of concern, every wave of her sympathy, every pass of her deft hands, quick poise of her head or touch of her gentle fingers, matter for ravishment of sense or stuff for a madrigal. He had not come unscarred from the tussle. His dress was disordered, his hair gave shocks. He had lost his plumed cap, his white leg was speckled here and there with porter's blood, down his green leg meandered his own like a lazy brook among water-meadows. One shoe had been in the gutter, one was still there; his cloak was pricked like a pounce-box. The young lady, kneeling on

the floor in front of him, pinched her red lip as she considered his case.

"'Why did you kill the porter?' she presently asked him. Her eyes, clear, green and steadfast, made his heart jump. They made him, also, reason *à priori* against the truth and the best systems of philosophy; they made him answer her as he thought her beauty deserved.

"'Can you ask me, Madonna?' he replied. 'It was that the sound of his fall might cause you to turn your head.'

"'I think it has turned your own,' said the lady, 'for I find your reason a poor one; and I hope you perceive how I am involved in the scrape. If you cannot remain here, certainly I cannot either. My father, it is true, set a high value upon that porter; but he sets a higher value on me. To have me haled before the Podestà in his absence, or set to huddle in the cage with an unknown gentleman, would do him a mortal injury and be a sorry return for all his affection. I must go away for a time, and the sooner the better.'

"'I, too, must go away,' said Galeotto, trembling. 'It will be impossible for me to face my mother in this state, equally so to attend the Duke's levee. Oh, Madonna!' he cried suddenly, 'Let us fly together!'

"The lady considered the position; her head, held sideways, looked charmingly wise. The rough music of the street continued.

"'The door must fall in ten minutes,' she said. 'It is time to act. Where do you propose to take shelter?'

"'A swamp were paradise by your side!'

exclaimed Galeotto. 'But I suggest Venice, where I have a relative in good odour with the Signiory. Widow of my cousin Raniero, she is called Donna Camilla, a lady as handsome as she is young, as rich as she is hospitable — at least, so she is reported. If we could leave Mantua we should be safe with her; and with you, lady, for my bride ——'

"He stopped unachieved because the lady looked at him in a peculiar way. It was curiously the look of his mother the Countess if he ventured the suggestion that peaches in the garden were meant to be eaten. The Countess had looked: 'Let me find you eating one, my son.' So looked this young lady.

"'What you say is excellent sense up to a point,' said she; 'beyond it I reserve my comments. But I think I will go to Venice, and to your cousin Donna Camilla. It will be necessary for you to lend me your clothes and name. What, may I ask, is the latter?'

"'It is Count Galeotto Galeotti, most adorable lady!' cried the Count. 'But when you have had it for a little while it will be Saint Galeotto, and my poor clothes will be relics.'

"'They are not much better now, thanks to your precipitation,' said she; 'but they must serve me for default of others. Honestly, I see no shorter way out of the mess. But if I am you, what will you be?'

"'Sacred lady,' he replied, 'if you go in my person, I must go in another's. That is a plain inference. Now, since I am utterly your servant, let me go with truth. I will go as your servant.'

"'Nothing could suit me so well,' said the lady. 'My real name is Isotta Beltraffi; but while I am Count Galeotti (which I hope will not be for long), you shall be my servant Fabrizio. That was the porter's name.'

"'Happy, happy Fabrizio!' cried the enchanted young man; 'Now art thou in paradise, Fabrizio!'

"'I sincerely hope so,' said Isotta. 'But I perceive that they have got the door down. We have no time to lose. Kindly follow me: you must remove your clothes while I find you some which suit your new station in life. We have a boat on the lagoon which will take us safely over.'

"So saying she conducted him to a remote part of the house; and while the police were unmasking the servants below, the real actors in the drama were masking above.

"A *sandolo* lay close under the wall, and was reached easily from a little window. The new Galeotto, the new Fabrizio, found no difficulties which could not be surmounted, though the heart of one at least was often in his mouth. The master sat cloaked in the well; the man took the poop to work the oar. They slipped along under the lee of the houses until, having passed a jutting corner, they opened the belfry of Santa Barbara; then, striking boldly across, they shot the Ponte San Giorgio by a middle arch, and found themselves far from pursuit in the lower lake. Here safety was. They navigated it from end to end; instead of slipping into the reeds on the further shore, grown bold by use, they took the quay at San Vito, left the boat, walked across the fields to Sustinente, and there hired a bark

and two rowers to take them down the Po. It is proper to say that the pretended Galeotto directed all these simple operations; the real was for hiding in every pollard they came by. Isotta laughed at him.

"'It is as well that you play servant in our affairs,' she said: 'we should both be in the Gabbia by this time if I had followed your rules. Can you not understand that two men lurking in a small tree must always make a curious, and generally a suspicious appearance, whereas walking on a hard road they are nothing out of the ordinary? And you are a courtier, and I the daughter of a woolcarder! What am I to think?'

"'You are to think that your beauty has engrossed my wits, Madonna, if you think of me at all,' said the enamoured Galeotto.

"'If I were to think of you seriously,' replied Isotta, 'I should relinquish the adventure. My beauty, as you call it, has more important things to do than to engross what wits you have left. I have never been to Venice, and as for your cousin Donna Camilla, who is now to be my cousin, I had never heard of her until an hour ago. Please to tell me something more precise about her.'

"'Oh, set me harder tasks, most lovely master!' cried Galeotto.

"'I will at need, I assure you,' said Isotta. 'Meantime oblige me in this particular.'

"Galeotto complied. But I think your ladyships will do better with my account.

"Donna Camilla, then, was a dove-eyed, dimpled lady of not more than twenty-five years old,

widow of a dead Raniero Galeotti, a famous captain of the Republic's, much older than his wife —a man of energy, a man of some violence, a man of white hairs. He had been exorbitantly fond of her in his lifetime, had made her so comfortable, and by his death left her so, that although she had been three years a widow she had seen no reason to change her estate. Quite otherwise: common gratitude suggested that she should continue to mourn a man whose demise had been of such extreme advantage. A palace on the Rio Pantaleone, a domain (with a summer villa) at Bassano, a houseful of old (and quiet) servants, her wishes foreseen, her whims condoned, a large number of suitors, and the memory of her windy old lord to make their daily rejection at once luxury and sacrifice: — what more could Donna Camilla want? Absolutely nothing, she declared. She was her own lover; more than that, her servants were so old, so much in authority, yet so indulgent, that her position was rather that of a lapped favourite than a mistress; she was like a pet child with twenty fathers and four-and-twenty mothers instead of an ordinary couple. Two demands upon society are made by a Donna Camilla —fondling, and an object of gentle tears. She got the first at home; the second she found in a portly alabaster monument which she had caused to be set up in the Church of Saint John and Saint Paul. To exchange this ease and security for a new Venetian lord was not at all to her mind. Such an one would expect more than tears; he would only fondle while expectation remained. Expectation satisfied, the object re-

duced into possession, love would fly out of window and the noble Venetian be free for commerce. If she knew her countrymen this was certain: there were not many Don Ranieros in Venice. Having such views, it is not to be wondered at that Donna Camilla remained sole. She was never tired of enlarging to her new maid Estella upon her exact advantages.

"'I am here,' she said, 'as snug as a fish in the sea. There is no romance in Venice; nothing but fishing. Is not marriage a net? Some day you will know it, child, as well as I do.'

"But Estella, a pretty young woman, hung her head and sighed. Marriage was precisely the net in which she hoped to entangle Donna Camilla.

"I would not on any account deceive your ladyships. Estella, as well as being the youngest maid in Donna Camilla's service, was the son of a gondolier of San Nicolò — a lad of parts who, having been egged on to precocity by the attentions of his quarter, had flattered himself into a passion for the lady of Don Raniero, and for a year or two paid her such homage as he could. This had been very innocently accepted on her part, since she knew nothing in the world about it. The Dominicans, who had taught him his book, had encouraged his singing-voice and put him in the choir. In time he had been advanced to be assistant to the sacristan of Saint John and Saint Paul. As such, he had first seen Donna Camilla, as such performed his small office at the obsequies of Don Raniero, and stood by sympathetically whenever, after that, Donna Camilla had deplored his remains. He was diligent in

small services — dusted the pavement for her knees, bowed her from and to her gondola, polished the handsome sarcophagus, the shining alabaster bosom, the shining head of the effigy, sniffed once or twice a day in accord with her sighs; these things he did until he believed himself her lover. And because to think yourself a thing is to be that thing, her lover (at this distance) he actually was. Now to love is to desire, and to desire to grow. To grow is to need new clothes.

"Eugenio, that was his true name, apart from his humble station in life, felt that he had more to recommend him than his gains represented. He was very good looking, very intelligent; he took himself very seriously, knew himself very prudent. 'The problem before me,' he told himself, 'is how to see my adorable mistress without risk of observation. One does not marry precipitately, blindly; and here in the church I see but one side of her — the pious. It would be only right — if I am to commit myself — that I should consider her in moments of relaxation — gay, discreet, witty, ardent, as I am sure she must sometimes be. The difficulties of drawing her into a general conversation when she is lamenting departed merit are extreme. You cannot expect her to detach herself from her surroundings; the transition is too abrupt, hardly delicate, even. On the other hand, to engage her outside, in the *piazza*, on the *riva*, when she steps into or out of her gondola — that would be to expose myself, possibly to ridicule, certainly to a rebuff or rebuffs. Conversation would be forced; I should not do myself justice, nor would she. Then

there is another thing. Assume she pleases, assume I advance: the advantages I have to offer her — devotion, some natural shrewdness, youth, a handsome person — need gradual discovery for their efficiency. They are like slow-ripening fruits, which need warmth and light for maturity. To fall on my knees, to clasp hers, to press her hand, to weep before her — anyone can play such antics; I'll be bound to say that some hundreds have played them. And with what result? With none. No, no; that is not the way to work. The same good genius which counsels me to consider the lady's character urges the greatest deliberation in revealing my passion.'

"He thought long and carefully over the problem before he hit upon the plan which places him so hopefully before us; it was indeed a chance inquiry of the lady's directed to his Sacristan, for a respectable young maid to act in the still-room, which finally decided him. 'Very properly,' Donna Camilla had said, 'I have kept on all my good husband's servants. Poor dear! they have grown up with him; and now he has given them the slip. They make me very comfortable, are all that servants should be; but they are far from sprightly. And while I should never suffer a newcomer to encroach upon their rights, to be about my immediate person, for instance, yet they cannot live for ever; and it is a bad thing for a widow to let her weeds encumber her. I need a little worldly conversation now and again — not ceremonious or courtly, of which I have more than enough, but familiar without being licentious, jocularity robbed of its vulgar sting. Find me a

decent young woman for training, Don Ruggiero, if you can.' The decent young woman who waited upon Donna Camilla next day was Eugenio, and not of Don Ruggiero's recommendation: he was engaged upon the spot.

"The lady had never regretted it. Estella was a charming companion, a good needle-woman, had great taste as a dressmaker, was industrious, discreet, trustworthy: upon occasion her faculty of humorous observation was a delight to her mistress. Eugenio, too, was perfectly contented: he was more and more satisfied with the mind and person of Donna Camilla. It is true, he stood in a very humble capacity, never as yet in one of confidential service. He knew that he was on promotion; but he saw the lady of his choice, talked with her, wrote her notes, accompanied her in her walks on the Piazza, went with her to church, made her clothes, and so on. He was no nearer to declaration, of course; seeing that she had no conception that he was not Estella, one would be inclined to say she could have none that he was really Eugenio. Perhaps the youth had a relish for mystery: it is said to be the root of all the romance and half the love-affairs of the world. Be that as it may, this was the position of Donna Camilla's household upon the day of the arrival of a letter, brought by a heated messenger, to announce the presence in Venice of her cousin, Don Galeotto Galeotti, attended by his servant. The writer implored his kinswoman's hospitality until a certain local storm in Mantua had blown over: he expressed himself with vivacity and point.

"'My cousin writes a brisk letter,' said Donna Camilla, 'which savours (but not unpleasantly) of impertinence. What have I to do with the weather in Mantua? He is probably very young: I hope his servant is less so. I have to think of you, child.' Estella, not best pleased, had to think of her mistress. She was bid write a letter to Galeotto at his inn assuring him of a friendly welcome. About noon he came.

"All doubts as to his youth and impertinence were immediately set at rest. He had both; but wore them so pleasantly that one would have regretted their absence. The servant, Donna Camilla was pleased to see, seemed a backward fellow. Don Galeotto came quickly forward into the hall and kissed his cousin on both cheeks.

"'The deaths of fifty porters,' he said gallantly, 'would not have been too great a price for this. Besides, cousins have a blood-tie, not always recognized, to which that of a porter or two may well be sacrificed.' He kissed Donna Camilla again, then let his tongue run on to the wonders of Venice.

"'A well-set jewel indeed, this Venice!' he exclaimed. 'What! an opal to swim in a bed of sapphire! Your canals are streams of blue wonder, your palaces fired pearls — by which understand opals, dear Camilla. We came by the lagoon from Adria; we saw your Venice resting in the water like a sea-bird, a flake, a white roseleaf adrift in hyacinth! And within your walls, fresh delight. What deep spaces, what shade, what rest! What queenly hostesses!' Here he pressed Donna Camilla's hand. 'What fresh maids!'

And here he patted Estella's cheek. 'Cousin Camilla,' he assured her, 'the death of a porter took me from Mantua; suicide only will sever me from Venice. It is a beautiful thought that one and the same act have won paradise for a man and his killer.' So he ran on, talking a language which was implicitly flattering if explicitly Greek to Donna Camilla (who knew nothing of Mantuan porters), but was at all events extremely exhilarating and pleasant. She offered him a collation; he took her hand.

"'If you will be my partner, cousin, we will collate all the afternoon,' he said. 'Let my servant dispose of himself to your least annoyance. He must make purchases for me before nightfall: I left Mantua hurriedly. But I can tell you all that at table. Thank Heaven for the gift of tongues.'

"'Heaven has enriched you indeed, Galeotto,' said Donna Camilla. Then to her maid. 'Estella, take the Signor Conte's man to the still-room, and see that he wants for nothing.'

"'His name is Fabrizio,' said the surprising cousin: 'he will have a pretty hostess. Fabrizio, remember that the man is ape of his master. Ape me with discretion, if you please, for the credit of Mantua.' He then followed Donna Camilla to the *Salotto*, leaving a very rueful man to the attentions of a very unwilling maid.

"Whatever the poets may say, it is a mistake to press analogies home: the disadvantages of being a servant when you are properly a lover are made manifest when the dream becomes fact. Here was a pair of lovers, at any rate, indifferently pleased

by the turn of affairs; one separated from his mistress, the other as near to her, indeed, as ever, but in a very critical situation, unable to push his reasonable claims. The pretended Fabrizio barely saw his beloved Isotta; the pretended Estella enjoyed more, but also he suffered more. He was desperately jealous of the lively young gentleman who, as the days went on, grew to be on such familiar terms with Donna Camilla. Fabrizio was jealous also, but not on a sure ground; the utmost he could say was that what he knew to be innocent the actors did not know. But Estella (who knew less than he) saw the very fabric of his plans crumble before his eyes; they could have dissolved no faster if Eugenio had remained Eugenio. His was the more desperate situation; it made him a morose companion for the still-room, where Fabrizio sat gloomily day by day, unamused and unamusing. It was on the edge of his tongue to confide in the valet; sometimes he had hopes that his romantic history might appeal to him; but Fabrizio seemed to hold him off in some unaccountable way, and to belie all he had ever heard of the assurance of gentlemen's gentleman. With Donna Camilla he had chances now and again of putting in a seasonable word. He ventured one evening to throw doubts upon the young Count's ingenuousness. 'My lady,' said he, 'a nobleman who can kill a porter to make a lady (not your ladyship, observe) turn her head round must be one of two things — so careless of life as to be unworthy to keep it, or so curious in love as to be dangerous to our sex. At least, it seems so to me.'

"'Why, girl,' said Donna Camilla, 'have you had a tiff with Fabrizio that you decry gallantry? I thought in your class you valued a swain by the length of his arm.'

"'Some may do so, madama,' replied the maid; 'but I think a long head is the better property. Long ears often go with long arms.'

"'Long tongues appear to go with maids,' said Donna Camilla, nettled: 'Estella, you are hurting me detestably. I hate clumsy fingers.' Estella was silenced.

"On his side, Fabrizio was sinking into a settled melancholy. Absence from his mother may have had much to do with it; absence from the court, of which he was such a real ornament, a little; no doubt, the growing intimacy of Donna Camilla and his mistress had most of all. He honestly admired Donna Camilla. What embarrassed him was, that just what Isotta seemed to him, Donna Camilla found her also, and that just as he found Donna Camilla delightful, so Isotta seemed to delight in her. After a little while letters began to arrive from Mantua, addressed in a hand which he knew very well, to Count Galeotto Galeotti. His mother! He was on the point of opening the first of these when Estella happened to look over his shoulder. 'Hey!' said this pert young woman, 'What are you about, Fabrizio? Is this the way of Mantuan lacqueys? Read your master's letters? You will be serenading his mistress next.' Galeotto had no choice but to take Isotta his mother's letter, to stand by while she broke the seal and galloped through the contents, to see her crush it up and throw it in the fire, and to be dis-

missed with the curtest nod he had ever seen imperil the urbanity of a lady. This was very mortifying, yet worse was to come. It seems that so soon as the Countess had ascertained the whereabouts of her son, she fired off letter after letter to Venice. All these Isotta read, many of them she discussed candidly with Donna Camilla. Her references to his mother always amazed and sometimes shocked him.

"'The old dragoon has the gout, cousin,' Isotta would say. The old dragoon!

"'Mantua is in a ferment,' he learned at another reading. 'They threaten my mother with the question. The cage may be her fate yet.' The question! The cage for his mother! The thing was getting most serious. He had yet to learn that at serious times Isotta husbanded her words. That day came when, on the receipt of a shortish letter, she pinched her pretty lip. Donna Camilla, looking over her shoulder, shrieked, then grew tremulous. Tears filled her eyes: 'Dear, dearest Galeotto, we will suffer together!' she urged: 'Oh, give me that poor right!' Whereupon Isotta kissed her; and then, with intention, dismissed Fabrizio. Donna Camilla took the hint, and dismissed Estella, who had been panting by the wall. The disconsolate pair of servants strayed into the garden. Estella sat down on the nearest seat and began to kick holes in the gravel. Fabrizio took her hand.

"'Don't do that,' said Estella; 'that is no sport for me.' Fabrizio struck his forehead.

"'Heaven knows what it is to me, Estella!' he said, sighing profoundly.

"'This pig is about to propose to me,' thought Estella, and looked sulkily at the ground.

"'You consider it beneath your notice, no doubt,' Fabrizio pursued, 'that a mere lacquey should seek the sympathies of a virtuous and modest young woman — for however humble your station, such I am sure you are. I cannot deny your feeling; yet I entreat you to consider me a little more anxiously before you spurn me away.'

"'What do you mean, Fabrizio?' said Estella, looking at him. Fabrizio took her hand again.

"'I am not what I appear, Estella, believe it,' he said. 'Nothing but an overmastering passion ——'

"'Heavens!' said Estella — but he went on — 'combined with a not unreasonable respect for my mother, would have driven me to the condition in which I find myself.'

"'Is this your case indeed?' cried Estella, much interested. 'Listen then; it is on all-fours with my own. Never was such a singular thing. I also suffer from an attachment which is to me as a goad to a mule. I also, I assure you, am very far from being what I seem. Like you, as well as being in love, I go in fear of my father's stick.'

"Fabrizio pressed the maid's hand tenderly. 'This ought to draw us nearer to one another, dear Estella,' he said. 'It is a striking case.'

"'It would be, I can tell you,' Estella agreed, 'if my father's stick came within reach of my back. I suppose you have the same feeling.'

"'My mother uses her crutch,' said Fabrizio seriously. 'Dear Estella, I could find it in my heart to declare myself — did I not ——'

"'I beg that you will do nothing of the kind,' said Estella; 'there is no knowing what might come of it. My own affair is on the tip of my tongue. And surely you have held my hand long enough.'

"'Ten thousand pardons,' cried Fabrizio: 'I had forgotten the circumstance.'

"A slight noise on the gravel caused the two unfortunates to look hastily round: it was too late; Donna Camilla and her cousin had both seen the tender situation. The former turned it deftly to serve her own occasions. 'Here, cousin,' she said, 'are our servants teaching us wisdom. Your Fabrizio knows what he is about.'

"'It seems so indeed,' replied Galeotto, with a needlessly high colour. 'If that is his wisdom, he shall reap the reward of it as soon as you please. I knew that he had the spirit of a shrew-mouse; but Estella must be an expert. A pest on him! Let her have him by all means.'

"'Ah, Galeotto,' sighed the love-lorn lady, 'that is not the only match I could agree to. But let the example be complete. Next week is the fair at San-Pietro-in-Castello, when as perhaps you know, weddings, for a day, are a matter of hand-fasting in the piazza. Shall we send in these two?'

"'If Fabrizio's tastes are in that quarter,' said Galeotto with intention, 'I am only too thankful to have known it — and to indulge him.'

"Donna Camilla called to her maid: 'Come hither, child.'

"Estella having curtsied, the lady patted her cheek. 'You have been a good servant to me, Estella,' says she, 'and I will show you that I am

not ungrateful. It is true, I had intended to promote you had you stayed a little longer; but having won the affection of an honest fellow I cannot stand in his way.'

"Estella at this began to raise a voice — 'Oh, my lady, I beg of you! Oh, my lady, the last thought! Oh, my lady!' and so on. Here was a pretty end to a pretty beginning! but Donna Camilla pursued her benevolent schemes.

"'Not too much protest, my dear,' she said with a reproving smile, 'or I shall think the Signor Conte right in his suspicions, that it is you who have led on poor Fabrizio. Look at him, child, he is blushing for you. No, no. He shall take you to good San-Pietro, and I will see that you have your festa in proper Venetian fashion, and a sound roof to your heads afterwards. Meantime you shall spend the honeymoon here.'

"It was time, Fabrizio felt, to protest. Very respectfully he approached Donna Camilla.

"'Madonna,' said he, 'I am most sensible, believe me, of your ladyship's beneficence, the grateful acceptance of which on my part is only prevented by the conviction of my own unworthiness. Madam, between this amiable young person and myself there is a barrier. Madam, as I have told her when she did me the honour to offer me her person and heart, I am not what I must seem to your ladyship.'

"'Nor am I, my lady, I assure you!' put in Estella; 'and as for proposals — oh, Madam, if you but knew how impossible is the thought!'

"'I appeal to my master!' cried the desper-

ate Fabrizio. Donna Camilla, unused to being thwarted, frowned.

"'Fabrizio,' said his master with decision. 'I hope that there has been no trifling with this girl's affections. I say that I hope; but a very few more words from you and that hope will be faint. What my lady proposes is becoming to one so high in position, so charitable, as she. You shall find that I am not behindhand. My mother's urgent business may call me shortly to Mantua; but I will see to your establishment first. No Galeotti shall be called a niggard to his servants. If this is your first affair of the heart, Fabrizio, I trust — nay I will see to it — that it is the last. You have won a young woman whom the Lady Camilla can praise: see that you deserve her. Come, cousin, let us leave the lovers together.' He offered his arm to Donna Camilla and led her away: they left behind them a very tongue-tied pair indeed.

"Fabrizio scattered gravel, Estella scattered gravel. Fabrizio inquired of the skies, Estella of the more solid earth.

"'If it were not for my mother, young woman ——' Galeotto began; then stopped.

"'If it wasn't for my father, my fine fellow ——' began Estella; then swore.

"It seemed to want but this outbreak on the bride's part to put a point to the bridegroom's martyrdom.

"The clouds in Mantua gathered so fast and so black that any sky in Venice showed light by the side of them. The Countess Galeotti's latest letter may be cited.

"'Galeotto,' she wrote, 'if neither religion nor filial piety can move you, I cannot suppose that the fingers of the civil power in your collar may do so. You have abandoned your mother to vicarious punishment, you have disgraced an ancient lady, an ancient name. Farewell. Any letter you choose to send me should be addressed to the Gabbia.'

"The Gabbia, your ladyships should know, was an iron cage, six feet by six, which hung (and still hangs) outside a tower in Mantua fifty feet above the street-level. To think of the Contessa Galeotti in it was to think of birds; and so Isotta, when she read this terrible letter, made a little clicking noise with her tongue. She brought Donna Camilla to her side in haste; but Donna Camilla was not one to stimulate thought. Thought just then was urgent. Isotta made her excuses and retired to pace the garden.

"'What is to be done?' she said to herself. 'Here is an old lady in the Gabbia, for no fault but maternity. Here, consequently (since this outrages our common humanity) is the Gabbia for Galeotto. Does he deserve so much? Surely not. True, he thrust his adventure upon me, killed my father's porter, sent me in disguise to Venice. If any one deserves the cage it is Galeotto. But have I not given him a better, a more deserved cage? Have I not contracted him to a servant-girl? Will not that be punishment enough for a Count of the Empire? I hope so; I think so. It will teach him, at least, not to trifle with the affections of gentlewomen. Very well then. It follows that I get the cage. I am

no bird; I have little relish for it; but what escape is there? Marriage with Donna Camilla? Yes: that is the only plan. It will be a very simple affair. She has great influence with the Ten; the Ten are allies of the Mantuan State. She will use her influence; but not unless I marry her. *Spretæ injuria formæ*, is how Galeotto would explain her refusal which would certainly come plump on my refusal. Once married, she will have two motives to help us — my danger and her own dignity. It is agreed, then, that I marry Donna Camilla at the approaching fair.'

"As fruit of this self-communion she bore a formal proposal of her hand to Donna Camilla, which was tremulously and gratefully accepted by the lady.

"The *sestiere* of San-Pietro-in-Castello lies between that of Saint Mark and the Lido. It was then chiefly populated by gondoliers and their families and enjoyed a singular custom. But then it had been the scene of a singular event. Centuries before, the Levantine pirates had ravished brides from it; and in memory of that picturesque ceremony the Castellani claimed and held the same privilege on the anniversary. Any man could marry any woman on that day, and many most effectively did. Row facing row they lined the Piazza; the maids stood loose-haired in white, each with her dowry in a box over her shoulder; the suitors came to choose; the Patriarch gave them a blessing and a sermon: they were married. It was a custom of plain advantage to others besides gondoliers (an easy race); it was a romantic custom, a picturesque custom;

it was at once simple, secret, and unofficial. Thus it appealed to Donna Camilla, who loved romance, and to Isotta, who just now (in her character of Galeotto) aimed at simplicity. Mixed feelings are to be expected in such an assembly as this, emotions as various as may at any time hold sway over the human breast; but probably Fabrizio was the most rueful bridegroom, and Estella the most truculent bride, San-Pietro-in-Castello had ever collected for benediction. Donna Camilla's was a perfectly normal case; as for the apparent Count Galeotto, we have seen what a firm perception of the logic of events characterized that distinguished person.

"Desperate efforts were made by the unhappy Fabrizio to clear himself. He essayed the lady of his election and the lady of his fate; the result was chagrin in the first case, wounded pride in the second. Isotta declined to discuss his affairs. She did not recognize her own name; she spoke as Galeotto Galeotti. 'You have chosen, Fabrizio,' she said, 'so far as I know, a perfectly respectable girl. If a porter had been killed for a sight of her eyes, for instance, it might easily have been her own father. I congratulate you upon your choice, and feel sure of your future.' Estella seemed to take no interest in the approaching ceremony. When he asked her, as tenderly as he could, if her father was likely to be present, to his great surprise she grunted. 'How would you like your mother to join him?' she asked in turn. There was but one answer to this for a man of truth. 'My dear Estella, I should die,' he said, deeply moved. 'Then I wish she would come,'

Estella had replied: an extraordinarily heartless reply. He painted his married life in the gloomiest colours; but then so did the bride paint hers.

"The maids formed up in a long row of white, for all the world like a snowy chain of crocuses hemming a garden path: opposite them stood their grooms, sheepish, shuffling young men for the most part, but all very much intent on the business in hand. When both sermon and blessing were done, Jack took his Gill, or Gill her Jack, as might be; and Fabrizio, feeling that something was required of the Galeotti fibre (even though smothered up in fustian) drew his Estella's arm within his own with such gallant observations as he could invent. He went so far as to salute her cheek, but met with neither response nor encouragement. Donna Camilla received her husband's brisk embrace with simple gratitude; then the whole party took boat for the Palazzo Galeotti and the marriage supper.

"That was felt to be, by two of the four at least, the latest possible moment for explanations. Unfortunately the moment was more urgently required by three officers of the Secret Police, who demanded by name Count Galeotto Galeotti, and when they found him would take no sort of denial. His rank, his condition, his interesting circumstances, youth, the influence of his lady—nothing could stand against the facts on which they leaned. The Duke of Mantua was in alliance with the Serene Republic, the Serene Republic ordered her ministers to convey Galeotto to the Duke.

"'My lord,' said they, 'the barge is at the steps.

We must ask your Excellency to give himself the trouble to enter it. If your Excellency's lady choose to accompany you we can hardly deny her; but it must be at her own risk.'

"'I dare not ask you, Camilla ——' Isotta began.

"'Ah, you dare not indeed, Galeotto, dearest husband,' pleaded the lady, 'unless you wish to procure my death. Nothing can separate us from this moment short of that.'

"'I have not the heart to disprove your generous fallacy, my dear,' said her husband. 'Well then, let us go. Officer, do your duty.' They were cloaked and led away by the officers. There was no scandal.

"Half an hour afterwards arrived the old Contessa Galeotti, dusty and terrible.

"'Where is my deplorable son?' she demanded fiercely of the porter.

"'I have not the least notion, madam,' he replied; 'I see you for the first time.'

"'You are extremely dull,' said the Countess. 'I am the Contessa Galeotti.'

"'Then, madam,' the porter said, 'I can satisfy you, I think. Your noble son is in the police-boat with his wife, going chained to Mantua.'

"'I don't believe a word of it,' said the Contessa drily. 'If you suppose that my son would take a wife without my approval you know very little of him, and still less of me. Produce my son.'

"The porter was confused. 'Love of God, madam,' he said, 'I cannot produce your honourable son, but I can refer you to his man. He also has been married to-day, and at this moment is supping with his wife.'

"'Take me down to this supper-party,' said the Contessa grimly: 'I know how to deal with servants.'

"'I can well believe your ladyship,' said the porter. 'I beg your ladyship to follow me.'

"The tap-tap of her crutch struck like a knell on the ears of the unfortunate Fabrizio, disturbing him in the midst of an absorbing conversation. Much as it ran counter to his fine theory of manners he was forced to interrupt his companion.

"'My dear Eugenio,' he said hurriedly, 'if that indeed be your name, yours is a most extraordinary case, equal with mine in misfortune. But there are worse things in the world than such a marriage as ours, and one of them (a parent offended) is close at hand. I refer to the approach of my sainted mother.'

"'Zounds!' said Eugenio, 'is that her famous crutch?'

"'I fear it, I fear it,' replied the perspiring young man. Eugenio saw that he certainly did.

"'Then I'll be running, my lord,' says he; but Galeotto whipped his arms round his middle.

"'Let me entreat, let me implore your countenance, Eugenio,' he said warmly. 'The very gravest consequences are to be feared——'

"'Let me go, let me go!' cried Eugenio. 'What the devil have I to do with your consequences? Do you think I don't value my skin as much as yours?'

"It was in the midst of this suggestive struggle, that the Countess appeared at the door, and fixed her piercing eyes on what she witnessed.

"For a short time she looked terribly on, resem-

bling most a wicked old bird that meditates attack, and holds his beak half-open for the pounce. The detected Galeotto dropped his companion as if he had been a live cinder.

"'What have you to say for yourself?' asks the Countess in a dry voice. Galeotto assumed a suffering expression.

"'It seems, mamma mia,' said he, 'that I have accidentally married this young gentleman.'

"'You are the greatest fool in Europe,' said the Countess, 'and I speak as the widow of your father. Pray, in what capacity do you stand? As husband or wife?'

"Galeotto made the most of his opening.

"'I see the difficulty,' he said as dispassionately as he could. 'It is a very real one. Eugenio, my friend, how do you take it?'

"'I take it very ill,' said Eugenio sulkily: 'but I agree with her ladyship's criticism.'

"Galeotto spread out his hands. 'You see how it is, mamma mia,' he began. The Countess cut him short.

"'I very soon shall, I assure you,' she said. 'Somebody has gone off to Mantua masquerading in your name. He will have fresh air for his performance, and a fine auditorium; but the stage is limited. As for you, little turnspit——' She faced to Eugenio, but Eugenio had disappeared.

"'That is a prudent young man,' said the Countess, 'there may be hopes of him yet. Now, Galeotto, my bark is waiting: march. But I must see Donna Camilla — where is your cousin?'

"'Mamma mia, she should be in the saloon,' said Galeotto. 'But she also is the victim of

circumstances, having to-day married Madonna Isotta Beltraffi, a young lady of great personal attractions. I can explain these unfortunate events ——'

"'I wish you could explain how you come to be my son,' said the Countess. 'That is the most unfortunate event of all, to my mind.' She turned to the porter, 'Where is your mistress?' she asks him.

"'Madam,' he replied, 'I have told you already that she is gone to Mantua with my lord her husband. It appears that there is some difficulty there. At any rate my mistress is accompanied by three of the Secret Police.'

"The Contessa looked sharply at Galeotto, whose face showed, of sufferance three parts, of interest three parts, and of pain six parts.

"'I really begin to believe that you are not quite the idiot I took you for,' said she. 'Go before me to the boat: off with you.'

"'Benissimo, mamma mia,' said Galeotto.

"There was no opportunity for discourse between the prisoners upon a matter so delicate as the sex of Donna Camilla's husband during the passage from Venice to Mantua. The near presence of three members of the Secret Police would have been enough to maintain Isotta's reserve. 'These honest fellows,' she would have said, 'believe with Donna Camilla that the Count Galeotti has been secured. To undeceive them now would be heartless; to undeceive my wife would be to cause her fruitless distress. How could I deny Donna Camilla the consolations of fidelity?' That tender-hearted soul sat huddling by her

husband — cold, dissolved in tears, shuddering under intermittent attacks of nerves, never far from hysterics, buoyed up only by the thought that she was acting the pattern wife. Over and over again she assured Isotta that she would never desert her. 'When you are in your airy prison, dearest,' said she, 'I shall be sitting on the ground beneath you. I shall look up and see the soles of your beloved feet; you will look down, and (if the weather be favourable) see the tears in my eyes. A great deal of comfort ought to pass from one to another in this way.'

"'I am sure of it, Camilla,' Isotta replied. 'But your plan is almost too heroic for Mantua. Consider, my love, the Tower of the Gabbia is situated in the Via Broletto, a street nearly as bustling as the Merceria of your Venice. It connects two markets. It is the highway to the Castello di Corte. My lodging will be out of shot of the passers-by, but yours, if on the ground, must invite comment. How can you endure it? Or how can I be witness of what you will have to bear?'

"'You can look the other way, dearest Galeotto,' she said, weeping, 'and I can mingle tears with the Mantuans, or importune the Duke as he passes.'

"'You are sanguine, my Camilla,' said Isotta with resignation. 'I cannot deny you.'

"A searching night-wind blew over the lagoon; the moonlight revealed little curling waves, cold and angry. Camilla and Isotta sat cuddling in one cloak until the former fell asleep with her

head on her companion's shoulder. One of the officers, disturbed by Isotta's sniffing, handed her a flask of strong waters.

"'Thank you, my friend,' said she. 'What sail is that coming up behind us? They will overhaul us, it seems.'

"'That, my lord,' said the man, 'will be the Contessa's, your lady mother's family barge. I know the rig of that lateen. It is a great stretch of cloth, but I think we shall hold her yet.'

"'The Contessa!' thought Isotta. 'Then she has escaped the cage; but by the same token my poor Fabrizio has not escaped. He is now in two cages, his wife's and his mother's. Obviously I do well to save him from a third.' So musing, she fell asleep.

"The police-boat held the barge throughout the night, and in the early hours of the morning, by stealing what wind there was managed not only to outsail her, but very dextrously to run her aground on a mud-bank. There she had to await the tide while the lighter vessel was skimming the silver stretches of the Mantuan lake, with the red-walled city in full sight. By the time the Contessa Galeotti was at home again, with the key of Galeotto's chamber in her pocket, Isotta was admiring the view from the top of the Gabbia Tower and the citizens admiring Donna Camilla at the bottom of it. It was open to the iron-faced old lady to join them, when she presently came in a litter, some Archers of the Guard in attendance, and a permit to visit the prisoner in her hand. But the exhibition of Donna Camilla on the ground did not entertain her.

"'Who is this natural?' she asked of a bystander.

"'Eh, madam, who knows if not your ladyship?' was the answer. 'I take her to be wife of the deplorable gentleman above.'

"'Wife of a pig!' said the Countess with some heat. 'Is the name of Galeotti to be brayed over Mantua by donkeys?'

"Donna Camilla, hearing her own name, came forward and clasped the Contessa's knees.

"'I adjure you, my mother, help your unfortunate son!' she cried.

"'I *have* helped him,' said the Countess grimly.

"'Mercy shall be called Galeotti from this hour. You will save him from the cage, I know it.'

"Donna Camilla rose triumphant from her griefs.

"'On the contrary, I have put him in one, young lady,' said the Countess; 'and am now going to transfer him to another.' Donna Camilla sat down.

"'You have a heart of stone,' said she. 'For my part, I will never leave this spot until my husband is restored to my arms.'

"'Then you won't leave it at all, my lady,' remarked the Countess, chuckling. She went into the tower and left Donna Camilla to the contemplation of Isotta's footsoles.

"There are one hundred and thirteen steps from the ground to the cage door; but the Countess surmounted them, having been lent by rage what breath had taken away. Rage remained though breath did not when the prisoner was haled out

at command, and revealed to the panting old lady a dark-skinned slim youth (to all appearance), very composed.

"The Countess was not composed. 'Have done with this mummery,' she snapped. 'You are a woman.'

"'It is hardly for your ladyship to reproach me with that,' Isotta replied.

"'I am not here to play shuttlecock,' said the Countess. 'What is the meaning of this knavery?'

"'It is not knavery, but logic that has brought me here,' Isotta observed, 'as you will allow, madam, if you listen to what I have to say.'

"'Upon my word, young woman,' said the Countess, 'if you can make that good I shall be interested. Go on.'

"Isotta told the whole of her story, concluding with these words:—'Your son, Countess, has acted throughout in what I must call a spirit of levity. If he must needs kill a porter, he need not have killed my father's favourite porter. But why kill a porter at all? He might have asked me to look out of the window: I should certainly have obliged him. But, having done so, having gone with me to Venice with professions of respect on his lips, what must he do but begin a vulgar intrigue with a waiting woman? I wished to punish him for that, and I have done so. You suffer also; I regret it. But at least he will kill no more porters, and turn the heads of no more ladies. His wife will see to that.'

"'His mother would have seen to it,' said the Countess. 'My dear, you have reasoned admira-

bly up to your point. So far I congratulate you. But you have married my son to a young man. Your Estella has changed sex as well as you.'

"'Why did he do that?' asked Isotta, much interested.

"'It seems that he had a thought of falling in love with my niece, and wished to judge of her domesticity,' said the Countess.

"'If I could find that young man,' cried Isotta, 'I should certainly marry him myself.'

"'You are not likely to do that, my friend,' the Countess informed her. 'Master has bolted.'

"'He must be found,' Isotta said, 'he is much too ingenious to be lost.'

"The Countess took her hand.

"'Marry my son,' she urged, 'you will be excellent with him. I am getting too old for estate management: I need a steward. I do hope you will think of it. I will go down on my sound knee if you insist, although I would much rather not.'

"'I would oblige you without such a condescension, dear Countess,' Isotta assured her, 'if I could see my way. The truth is that I have no sort of interest in your son beyond the fact that your son he is. But I will think of it. Meantime, if you can have me extricated from this place I shall be very much obliged to you.'

"'In two minutes!' cried the Countess, and then and there wrote a letter to the Duke.

"I return to Galeotto, left under lock and key in the palace of his ancestors. You little know that gentleman if you think that he could bring himself to remain there. Pacing up and down

his chamber, he allowed full play to the agitations of his mind.

"'I adore my mother, not only as the source of my being, but as a moral spectacle,' he told himself. 'I find in her a superior order of mind, a force of character really remarkable in a woman. Not only respect, reason also, counsels me to remain a prisoner. But the question arises, can I let the beautiful (if headstrong) Isotta suffer for my fault, because she happens to stand up in my small-clothes? Cruel in intention as she has been to me, the thought is unendurable. She is no doubt at this moment in the Gabbia on a capital charge, she stands within the peril of the law. Either she must be released or I suffer with her. It is plain that, while the former is out of my power, the latter is within it. I must escape from this house and place myself immediately below the cage. It is a hateful prospect; but the contemplation of her charming form exposed to the contempt of the very birds will strengthen me for what I am about to do. It must never be said of a Galeotti that he allowed a gentlewoman to suffer without enduring equal pains himself. Nor must I forget that I love her. My mother has locked the door, and quite rightly, since she wished to keep me in. I, with equal propriety, will essay the window, since I wish to get out.'

"He dressed himself with pains in a suit of rich green velvet, arranged his hair, put on a pair of scarlet shoes, and then by means of a gutter, some cords and a small section of the litany reached the ground in safety. He was not long cutting his way through the crowds in the Via Broletto and

so being seen by Donna Camilla. To her, who had nearly exhausted her comments upon the melancholy situation, his appearance acted like the rod of Moses. Eloquence gushed from her; she rose to address the attentive citizens. 'See in this, Mantuans,' she declared, 'a deed worthy of Roman record. Behold the faithful servant of a good master! Rejoice all of you, masters, and take heart all you servants; for where there is one there may be another. Fabrizio, Fabrizio, jocund is the ministry of thy feet! An honest lacquey has been a contradiction in terms until by this glorious example thou hast affirmed it.'

"'Madam,' said Galeotto, taking a seat beside her on the ground, 'it is true that I have come to suffer in this place, thinking myself happy to be where my duty binds me. It is true that I hope by this means to alleviate the pains of the martyr above us. But I dare not pretend to the splendid office you propose me. Madam, I am no servant, I am no Fabrizio: I am your unhappy, your afflicted cousin Galeotto Galeotti.'

"Donna Camilla gasped — 'But my husband——'

"'Cousin,' said Galeotto, 'we are performing paradoxes, it seems. Your husband, if I may say so, has to name Isotta Beltraffi. He, or rather she, is daughter to a respectable merchant of this place, Messer Domenica Beltraffi, whose favourite porter I had the misfortune to kill.'

"'Is it so?' cried Donna Camilla. 'Then my husband is innocent!' She could only, as you see, take one point at a time.

"'She is as innocent as you are,' replied Gale-

otto. 'It is I who should occupy her room; but since I cannot do that I have put myself as near to it as I can. This ground is very damp: it will endanger my health fully as much as the cage could do. But I deemed it my duty. Moreover, I am close at hand in case it should occur to the authorities to arrest me.'

"'You have done a very noble act, Galeotto,' said Donna Camilla, warmly.

"'I hope so, I hope so,' he returned. 'I could do no less, Camilla. The lady above us has done a noble act; you have done a noble act. Noble acts are in the air.'

"'They are, indeed,' she assented. 'But what have you done with my Estella? Is she acting nobly anywhere?'

"'I doubt it,' said Galeotto. 'The acts of Estella (since you call him so) have been characterized by prudence rather than gallantry. He did not accompany me from Venice. But I see that I surprise you. Know then ——' And he explained the nature of his marriage to the astonished lady, who, when she had sufficiently recovered, said —

"'One thing is clear to me in all this entanglement. Madam Isotta must be released. You did the deed; you must suffer.'

"'Eh,' cried Galeotto, 'but I am suffering!'

"'I had hoped,' said Donna Camilla, 'that my company might have distracted you. But if it does not, I must again admire your heroic resolution to undergo without flinching whatever may be due.'

"Galeotto kissed her hand, and the citizens cheered the exalted pair.

"A messenger from the Duke very shortly afterwards brought down the Countess with Isotta. The order was for the whole company to appear before him. The Countess surveyed her son.

"'What are you doing here, jackanapes?' she asked.

"'I am suffering, mamma mia,' he replied, 'on account of the injured lady whose arm you now so kindly hold.'

"'The kindness,' said the Contessa, 'is all the other way. She might hold the Duke's arm with condescension. Get up, idiot, we are summoned to Court. Come and explain yourself if you can.'

"She hobbled off on Isotta's arm; and Galeotto, offering his to Donna Camilla, found it tenderly accepted.

"The whole matter was laid before Duke Guido Gonzaga, who had some difficulty in singling out what was, after all, the real point at issue. He found himself very unwilling to accept Galeotto's excuse for his precipitate action, and it was only when he elicited in casual conversation the facts that (1) the porter had jostled against the Count in the Via Larga, (2) that a friar of the bystanders had laughed, and that (3) the porter was not dead, that he felt at liberty to consider the case as one of justifiable potential homicide, for which the Statute Book of Mantua exacted no penalty. After that all other difficulties seemed light. Turning to the Countess he said, 'It is clear, madam, that all these persons are married by the laws of Venice. Venice being in alliance with Mantua,

it becomes me to see that her laws are observed. This I will do, with such latitude, however, as may reasonably be allowed to a sovereign prince. I must regard Madonna Isotta as the protagonist in this drama. She must come first. To Madonna Isotta, therefore, I offer the hand and heart of Count Galeotto Galeotti.'

"'I humbly thank your Grace,' said Isotta; 'but we choose as our characters make us. A man who could be such a fool as to endanger his neck twice for my sake is clearly no husband for a girl of my habit. I must gratefully decline your Grace's offer and transfer Messer Galeotto to the care of Donna Camilla. I consider, on the other hand, Eugenio to be a youth of prudence and great promise. If I can find him I shall certainly do my best to possess him.'

"'I shall yet congratulate Eugenio,' said the Countess, 'on a wife of sense.'

"'What do you say, Donna Camilla?' asked the Duke.

"Donna Camilla had been very much struck by her cousin's chivalry in the affair. Especially this latest act of his had moved her admiration.

"'It was very fine in him,' she declared. 'The cage must necessarily be draughty, and I understand his chest is delicate. I should be proud to become the wife of such a man.'

"So it was put to Galeotto, who replied as you would expect, that he was at the service of these ladies.

"Eugenio was not found for some six months, though Isotta hunted him high and low. Finally he was reported at Battaglia, where indeed he was

discovered acting as dry-nurse to a wine-grower's young family, passing by the name of Beppina, and a general favourite. When Isotta claimed him there was a momentary confusion inasmuch as several townsmen of substance (one being notary-public) had aspired to his hand; but there was no withstanding facts. Isotta led him to Mantua, married him, and treated him with kindly firmness for many years. He had no cause to lament her choice, although he was never able to share her cordial appreciation of the Contessa.

"That same Contessa Galeotti lived to a frosty old age. Her syllogisms upon the facts recorded — the result of a long observation of our species, more remarkable, perhaps, for shrewdness than a nice understanding of the system of Aristotle — may be thus expressed. They are two in number: —

"*α*. All men are fools. But my son is a great fool. Therefore, my son is a great man.

"*β*. All men are fools. But Eugenio is no fool. Therefore, Eugenio is not a man at all."

This truly remarkable tale, which was followed with the closest interest by the party,—each feeling that he or she might be touched in some secret part or other, — lasted well on towards supper-time. It was not ended, indeed, until our pilgrims were within the Prior's parlour at Christchurch, and within the fragrant *aura* of the great Saint whom they had sought for so many days. Here, regretfully, I must leave them, for my pen is dry. There was much for them to do besides their prayers. The Prioress was to be shown that Piers was not

Piers, but Percival; the Shipman convinced that Percival was not Jenny Perceforest; Captain Brazenhead was to be either hanged or ennobled; Percival himself either kissed or kicked. But so it is in this world, that we cannot have everything. We meet with persons here and there on our pilgrimages; we get entertainment out of them, or they out of us. They go their ways, we go ours. At any rate, I must go mine. *Valete.*